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SPRING BOOKS ISSUE

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LETTERS.

TWO DEFEND THURMAN

Mendocino, Calif.

As I finished reading Benita Eisler's review of *With Head and Heart*, the autobiography of Howard Thurman ["Keeping the Faith," *The Nation*, Jan. 5-12], my immediate reaction was one of stunned disbelief. . . . But I went on to read Ms. Eisler's accompanying most enthusiastic and approving review of *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson*, the story of a young black union organizer. Then I understood. Obviously a devoted "fellow traveler," if not an actual "card-carrying" Communist, Ms. Eisler could never be expected to appreciate, understand, or deem worthy of discussion the mysticism, dedication to nonviolence or deep spirituality of Dr. Thurman. . . .

I cannot let go unchallenged the many misrepresentations and the accusations of his lack of "direct action" in eliminating the evils of race discrimination, of nonparticipation in the civil rights movement and of courting "white philanthropy," as she called it, for purely personal gain, which peppered her review. . . . The whole thrust of Dr. Thurman's life and ministry was to thoroughly prepare himself and develop his many talents so that he could best help the *individual* to reach the highest possible degree of commitment for service to his community. . . .

Who can estimate the constructive contributions of the many thousands of *individuals* whose lives have been vitalized for service by this man? As to "civil rights" activism, could not these individual relationships have had their influence in the halls of Congress? (Incidentally, Dr. Thurman *did* join the "March on Washington" in person.)

Regarding misrepresentations, will Ms. Eisler please name the "several liberal San Francisco millionaires" who invited him to come to head Fellowship Church? Dr. A.G. Fisk, a Presbyterian clergyman and professor of philosophy at San Francisco State College who made the first and continuing contacts with Dr. Thurman, could hardly be put in the millionaire category. Also, will she name *any* other church anywhere so completely integrated and so community-oriented as Fellowship Church? She implied there was such. In passing, are not we of the middle class —social workers, teachers, etc.—as much in need of and as entitled to great inspirational leadership as the "disadvantaged" of Hosea Hudson's "ministry"? . . .

Margaret G. Cross

Berkeley, Calif.

It was shocking to read such a biased and ill-informed response to *With Head and Heart*, the autobiography of Dr. Howard Thurman. . . .

The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples was started as an unusual act of courage. In contrast to the reviewer's claims, it was, and is, a cross-class, cross-cultural, cross-racial and cross-creedal institution and, as such, it continues on its face to be a revolutionary phenomenon.

The Thurman praxis runs the gamut from racially integrating Eastern colleges to providing the basic books in establishing a public library for the economically impoverished people of the Fayette, Mississippi, community. . . .

The reviewer obviously operates from an a priori prejudice as to what is meaningful Black existence. The diversity of Black life's response to its existential dilemma bespeaks the implicit genius of Black survival.

Dr. Thurman's total existence has been in behalf of the human quotient without regard to race, sex, age, class, nation or creed. His praxis has given concrete form to such universal claims. . . . It was not irrelevant to open limited minds of Black youth through worship to international consciousness. This is as critical to an oppressed people as any other consciousness-raising action. Long before the civil rights movement, Dr. Thurman was active in the cause of peace and justice. . . .

From an ideological point of view, Dr. Thurman's importance to the quest for social justice is inestimable. His book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, is a critical fulcrum point in Black religious liberation thinking. . . . It places Jesus in his context of social struggle, develops a sense of strategy and emerges with an ethic for the first time. It is the love ethic, as explicated in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, which laid the foundation for Martin Luther King's approach to the redress of ancient wrong. . . .

(The Rev. Dr.) W. Hazaiah Williams
President
Center For Urban-Black Studies

EISLER REPLIES

New York City

More serious than being called a "card-carrying Communist" or "devoted fellow traveler" is the evidence that Ms. Cross and Dr. Williams misunderstand the nature and function of a book review.

By their works—specifically, the written one(s) under consideration—shall we know them. Neither the author's sermons, lectures or "individual relationships" have any bearing on the book discussed. But even more important in this instance, Dr. Thurman has written an autobiography: the reader, therefore, can only know what the writer has chosen to tell us of his life. When his participation in the March on Washington receives only three lines, while visits with heads of state, receptions and testimonial dinners crowd most of the book's several hundred pages, the reader must take the author's cue as to what "counted" for him; if I have underestimated Dr. Thurman's commitment to civil rights and social change, the fault is entirely his.

On the subject of the Fellowship Church, there are two issues that warrant clarification. Indeed, I am highly skeptical of the claim that this church was the first "inter-racial" congregation in America. Even more skeptical would be those Roman Catholics, Episcopalians (both lay and clergy) and of course, Quakers, whose communions and meeting have always been "interracial." Second, I stand corrected that Dr. A.G. Fisk, a Presbyterian clergyman, and not a group of San Francisco millionaires, originally invited Dr. Thurman to become founding pastor of the Fellowship Church. Some confusion, however, may be forgiven. Only a few paragraphs after we read of the congregation's establishment, we learn that prominent citizens contributed $20,000 to pay off the first mortgage; a short while later, an elaborate building program was launched which, we must assume, required even heavier donors.

Finally, the needs of the professional class for "inspirational leadership" are not in doubt. One may well question, however, the exclusively middle-class ministry, the constant preoccupation with the powerful—never the powerless—of a black pastor in the America of the 1960s.

Benita Eisler

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EDITORIALS.

Roots of Tragedy

The longer the hostage crisis drags on, the more we learn about the conduct of our Government in Iran and ourselves as a nation. On February 10, 1979, only two days before the revolution, the State Department called Ambassador William Sullivan at the Teheran embassy to inquire if it was too late to launch a military coup. In the last chaotic days of the Shah-appointed Bahktiar regime, President Carter's special military emissary Gen. Robert Huyser was instructed to prepare contingency plans for a coup by the Iranian military. A U.S. Navy tanker was even ordered to stand off the coast of Iran to supply fuel to the military if a coup was launched. And Rosalynn Carter did her part to buck up the Shah by writing "warm letters" to Empress Farah Diba.

All of this we learn in an article entitled "Carter and the Fall of the Shah" by Michael Ledeen and William Lewis in the current issue of *The Washington Quarterly.* The authors make these revelations in the course of criticizing the Administration for failing to implement the coup and lacking the *machismo* to endorse publicly an "iron-fisted" policy. Most people would draw quite different conclusions.

At the very least, it must be conceded that there was some substance to the Ayatollah Khomeini's seemingly paranoiac fears of an American-inspired counterrevolution. After all, General Huyser's mission and Carter's contingency coup plans contemplated violations of international law on a scale surpassing the militants' indefensible seizure of fifty-three hostages. How many more skeletons are buried?

This week we exhume one of them: a telex message (see box on next page) sent to the Shah by his "lifetime servant" in Washington, Iranian Ambassador Ardeshir Zahedi, reporting on a conversation he had had with Henry Kissinger. The telex is dated November 6, 1978, and conveys Kissinger's "congratulations" to the Shah on his recent decision to impose a martial-law Government. Kissinger, of course, has never been one to shy away from the "iron fist."

Items like these have convinced many Americans, including Barbara Timm, the mother of one of the hostages, who last week defied Carter's ban on travel to Iran, that a full-scale Congressional investigation is needed if we are ever to know what lies behind the hostage crisis.

As Aryeh Neier points out in the following editorial, an ominous curtain is lowering between the two countries as a

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result of the travel ban. A State Department official called relations between the United States and Iran "a Greek tragedy," adding: "We are inexorably marching to a disaster with the best intentions." The only hopes for deterring the President seemed to be an easing of domestic political pressures—perhaps by a smashing victory in Pennsylvania, but that was not to be, or a response by the Common Market countries to the President's clear threat of military action if they didn't come through with sanctions. They did—halfheartedly and with private misgivings.

Ironically, around the time that Carter was marching the country and its allies up the hill, a symposium on the turbulence in Central Asia was held, under the sponsorship of *The Nation*, WBAI Radio, The New School for Social Research and the DISARM Education Fund. Members of the panel on "Revolutionary Iran" shared insights gained from recent travel to that country—travel that will now cease. And a heated spontaneous confrontation between panelist Mangol Bayat, assistant professor of history at Harvard, and Mansour Farhang, Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations, on the issue of political rights in Iran, in the context of the attacks on leftist groups at Teheran University, showed the need for continuing dialogue between Iranians and progressives in this country, who desire the success of the Iranian revolution but are concerned about human rights. The Huyser mission revelations only add to Iranian distrust of Administration spokesmen; the cessation of unofficial exchanges like the symposium will mean that the alarums of war have completely drowned out the last voices of reason.

LOVE FROM HENRY

Telex 5584
Date 57/8/15 (Nov. 6, 1978)

Mr. Moienian, Head of the Imperial Bureau, dearest friend and brother:

Please submit this telegram to the attention of his excellency, the Shah-han-Shah. I kiss you from afar.

Ardeshir

His Excellency, the great Shah-han-Shah of Iran, who owns my very life:

Shah-han-Shah, your lifetime servant, after kissing your feet asks for the permission to bring to your attention the following:

I talked with Kissinger at 6:30 p.m. on the phone and he mentioned to me about the rumours that he has heard. He said that he is happy and sends his congratulations to you for the decision which was made by His excellency. Maybe it was better that the decision was made before. You probably had [*sic*] less difficulties.

You should have shown your strong resistance to the anti-government people and probably the political prisoners who were freed before should have been arrested again. That would have eased the situation.

Right to Travel

The right to travel is a part of the "liberty" of which the citizen cannot be deprived without due process of law under the Fifth Amendment.

—U.S. Supreme Court, *Kent* v. *Dulles* (1958)

Twice in the past month President Carter has interfered with the right of Americans to travel: first by threatening "legal sanctions" against the U.S. Olympic Committee or individual athletes if they do not boycott the Moscow Olympic Games, and second by announcing that he is "prohibiting travel to Iran." The ban on travel to Iran is accompanied by a threat to punish Americans for speaking to foreigners or corresponding with them either about travel to Iran or about the hostages in Iran. In the President's words, he is "prohibiting any transactions between Americans and foreign persons relating to such travel or the presence of Americans in Iran."

This is not the first time that a President has tried to restrict travel by Americans. Since the end of World War II, about a dozen countries have been designated as off-limits. But such restrictions on travel were contested in several court cases in the 1950s and 1960s and, a year and a half ago, Congress enacted and President Carter signed a new law narrowing the President's authority to impose restrictions. As a result, it is now clear that President Carter lacks authority to impose a ban on travel to either the Moscow Olympic Games or Iran. He could try to make good on his threat to punish those communicating with foreigners about travel to Iran or about the hostages by invoking the Logan Act—a law on the books since 1799 that has never been enforced. One reason it has not been enforced is that a prosecution under it would clearly violate the First Amendment.

The current law dealing with area restrictions on travel states, "A passport may not be designated as restricted for travel to or for use in any country other than a country with which the United States is at war, where armed hostilities are in progress, or where there is imminent danger to the public health or the physical safety of United States travelers." This is plainly inapplicable to the Moscow Olympic Games. We are not at war with the Soviet Union, and no one contends that American athletes visiting there would be in any danger. The situation in Iran is different. Although we are not at war (yet), the seizure of the hostages shows that Americans traveling to Iran could be in jeopardy. Accordingly, President Carter has the authority to deny Americans the use of passports for travel to Iran. The Supreme Court has upheld this power because "a passport is a document identifying a citizen, in effect requesting foreign powers to allow the bearer to enter and to pass freely and safely, recognizing the right of the bearer to the protection and good offices of American diplomatic and consular offices." Since United States cannot protect its citizens while they are in Iran, it can deny them the use of a document that allows them to invoke such protection. But the power to deny a passport for travel to Iran is not the power to ban travel to

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Iran. As the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in 1967, "Area restrictions on the use of an otherwise valid passport are not criminally enforceable." And, as the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled later in the same year, the Government may not deny a passport to a traveler planning to visit a restricted area if that person also intends to visit a nonrestricted area. It can only require that the traveler not take the passport into a restricted area.

Personally, I favor a boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games (see Neier, "The Wrong Reason," *The Nation*, February 9). The Soviet Union has recently imprisoned or exiled from Moscow scores of dissenters, most prominent among them Andrei Sakharov, to keep them from contact with visitors to the Olympics. I would like to see a boycott by athletes to protest use of the Games as an occasion to repress human rights. But a boycott coerced by the threat of legal sanctions on travel is an entirely different matter. Moreover, as the American Civil Liberties Union charges in a suit filed last week, Carter Administration officials forced the U.S. Olympic Committee to join the boycott by holding over its head the threat that its tax-exempt status would be revoked and by placing pressure on corporate contributors to the committee. A voluntary boycott by American athletes could have been a magnificent gesture of moral protest against the Soviet Union's violations of human rights; instead, we have a gross violation of the rights of American athletes by the Carter Administration.

President Carter's attempt to ban travel to Iran is even more harmful. It interferes with the right of all Americans to find out what is going on there. The prohibition on communications with foreigners about the hostages makes it clear that Carter's purpose is to shut off the flow of information. This is underscored by his call to American news organizations "to minimize as severely as possible their presence and their activities in Iran." While the President said his "authority will not now be used" to prohibit all American news reporting from Iran, he claimed he has such authority—from where, I cannot imagine—and implied that it might be used later on.

These restrictions on communication were announced by President Carter as part of what he described as "a series of economic and political sanctions designed to impose additional burdens on Iran." But what burdens do they impose? None on Iran, but a very heavy burden on the right of Americans to inform themselves.

The most disturbing aspect of the President's interference with the right to travel and the right to communicate is that, so far, it has aroused little protest. Most Americans seem to accept that their liberties should be curtailed to punish the Soviet Union for invading Afghanistan, and Iran for seizing American hostages. These abuses of the civil liberties of Americans will continue unless and until they are protested loudly and clearly.

ARYEH NEIER

Aryeh Neier, a member of The Nation*'s Editorial Board, is adjunct professor of law at New York University and a fellow of the New York Institute for the Humanities.*

Caveat Insurers

In the mid-1970s, the business community rent the air with anguished cries about sharply rising premiums for product liability insurance. The costs of insurance against claims for injuries caused by defective products had risen between 100 and 1,000 percent in 1975, depending on the company, industry spokesmen complained. They laid all the blame on the increase in the number of product liability claims (one million in 1976 was the figure commonly given), huge awards to claimants and courts that found manufacturers liable on the slightest pretext.

Industry's favorite horror story was about the man who won a huge jury verdict for a finger he lost while using his power lawn mower to trim a hedge. There were predictions of a rash of bankruptcies; product innovation would decline. Business-page pundits grumbled about the litigation-happy public.

As a result of the "crisis," a series of Congressional hearings were held and an interagency task force operating out of the U.S. Commerce Department was set up to probe the arcane system of insurance rate-making. The investigators' main discovery was that premiums had indeed skyrocketed. Beyond that, there were few facts to support business's panic. Instead of one million claims in 1976, the task force discovered, there had been only 60,000 to 70,000. An insurance industry study covering an eight-month period from 1976 through 1977 that was submitted to a Congressional committee put the average payment on product liability awards after trial or in out-of-court settlements at only $3,592 per claim. Companies had won about half the cases that went to trial before the crisis, and this success rate appeared to be holding. As for the digit-amputating lawn mower—pure fiction, as far as the task force could discover. It did unearth a different sort of horror story, however. A tiny company that sold fishbait (worms, grasshoppers, etc.) had been abruptly informed that its premiums were being raised from $52 to $472. The firm had been in business since 1902, and not a single product liability claim had ever been filed against it.

Analysis of the insurance industry's rate-making practices failed to uncover any rational, factual basis for the skyward surge of product liability premiums. "Panic pricing" was the only explanation the task force could come up with to describe the conduct of some insurers. The fact that the increase in premiums followed hard on the heels of a stock-market dip that cut heavily into the companies' investment reserves raised suspicions that the origin of the product liability crisis might have had little to do with any upsurge in claims. It may be only coincidental, but an earlier, identical medical malpractice insurance crisis was also preceded by a decline in the market.

While the facts uncovered by the Commerce Department study remain little known, businesses continue to exploit the inflated crisis. In state after state, industry-sponsored bills

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restricting the individual's right to recover damages for harm caused by defective products have sailed through the legislatures with little consideration of the possibility that reduced liability could remove manufacturers' incentive to make safe products, or of whether the laws will actually reduce insurance costs.

On the Federal level, Congress has thus far moved cautiously. Out of concern for small businesses that have been caught in the cost crunch, the House of Representatives recently passed the risk-retention act, which permits companies to form their own interstate product liability insurance groups. These are expected to provide them with coverage at lower rates than those offered by commercial insurers. (Not enamored of competition from this quarter, insurance lobbyists opposed the bill—arguing that there was no product liability crisis after all!)

This week, hearings begin in Congress on two proposals for a uniform Federal product liability act. One of them was drafted by the Commerce Department task force and makes a bona fide effort to balance the interests of producers and victims of defective products. The other is a lopsidedly pro-business package being put forward by a national group of manufacturers who hope to duplicate in Washington the successes industry has enjoyed in the state legislatures.

Neither bill has any chance of passage during the current session. Those who are promoting the anticonsumer bill will find a more skeptical audience on Capitol Hill, thanks to the work of the task force, and will encounter the sort of organized resistance that was absent in the states. The Commerce Department draft has not yet generated much support.

Nonetheless, the hearings could throw more light on the true nature of the Great Product Liability Crisis. If it turns out that it was brought on by panic behavior (or worse) on the part of insurers, Congress might even be persuaded to think the unthinkable, and consider whether to pull product liability insurance companies out from under the protection of the 1945 McCarran-Ferguson Act, which exempts the insurance industry from Federal regulation.

JOSEPH A. PAGE

Joseph A. Page is a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center.

Books of Spring

While book people are generally ready with opinions on the replacement of the National Book Awards by The American Book Awards and other issues of little moment to the majority of book readers, the craft of book reviewing scarcely rates much serious conversation, as if it were by now an affliction past cure or notice. Along with the police, with whom they are thought to have something in common, reviewers are suffered in our midst because we have not discovered how to do without them. Perhaps as a condition for enjoying my work, I don't entirely share this prejudice; like Norman Mailer, I think a good cop is a work of art, and fortunately find the same can be said of reviewers and their work. That is surely one reason for a book issue (ours begins on the next page); the other is that books and the discussion of them remain the best ways I know of for advancing ideas—including, of course, the ideas inherent in good fiction and poetry. I hope the pieces assembled in this issue have nothing more in common than their capacity to show that the book-writing and book-reviewing communities are not adversaries, that the latter need not be seen as a parasite on the former. If nothing else, I'm sure they demonstrate—in the varied backgrounds of the reviewers—that there are no very firm rules as to who should and should not review books.

Among the many not very useful articles of faith concerning book reviews is the one which frowns upon giving a book to a reviewer who has strong prejudices about the subject matter. But this is only prissiness disguised as scruple, and a little misleading at that: how, for instance, are readers to discover that Leonard Mosley's much-praised new book on the du Ponts, reviewed by Gerard Colby Zilg (page 530), is little more than a family whitewash without reading Zilg's evaluation of the book based on his own extensive research on the clan? And what about the cult of the reviewer as specialist, which is often at odds with the prohibition on highly partisan critics? When the subject contains as much ideological heavy weather as left-wing politics, a concerned nonspecialist like Tom Smucker (see page 526) who can ventilate it with wit and some irreverence helps restore perspective. There is, moreover, still a class of professional book reviewers, nonspecialists par excellence. Benny Green is one of these (page 519); his pieces light up the pages of several English publications without ever (another article of faith to the contrary) sacrificing depth. For the most part, what the book editor wants is a reviewer who will bring good work to the attention of readers, as Robert Sherrill has consistently done for the books of other investigative reporters. By comparison with the composition of a book, the critical act is abrupt, so that the judicious and persistent generosity of a reviewer such as Sherrill or Theodore Rosengarten (page 537) helps restore some equity to the unequal relationship of writer and critic.

All of this is not to say that I haven't prohibitions and restrictions of my own which I occasionally follow. For the most part, they push me in the direction of reviewers such as Edward W. Said, Samuel Hynes, Michael Malone, Clara Claiborne Park and Michael Hamburger, all of whom are in this issue, all of whom take responsibility for a tradition when they engage the ideas of a book. For them, the critical act is never done ad hoc.

ELIZABETH POCHODA

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Blair/Orwell and the Comedy of Class

BENNY GREEN

ORWELL: The Transformation. *By Peter Stansky and William Abrahams. Alfred A. Knopf. 324 pp. $12.95.*

The transformation to which Peter Stansky and William Abrahams refer is the one in which the seedy bourgeois Eric Blair metamorphosed into the socialist crusader George Orwell, and any just assessment of their book has to take into account an earlier volume by the same team, *The Unknown Orwell*. Both books are mistitled, for in *The Unknown Orwell*, Orwell becomes known through the diligent researches of historians determined to breach the wily reticence of a man who left instructions that no biography ever be written. And it is in *The Unknown Orwell* that the transformation from Blair to Orwell takes place and is explained. What this second volume supplies is a blow-by-blow account of how the man born of the transformation, the Orwell we read today, went about his daily task. That is why the first book was fascinating, because it instructed us in the nature of an unusual as well as an unknown man, and why the second book is not, because it consists of a catalogue of manuscripts submitted, copies sold, moneys earned. To be fair to the authors, this account ends with Orwell's return from the Spanish Civil War, leaving room for a third and final volume, in which case it will one day be seen that it is the second section of Orwell's life, after the transformation but before the apotheosis, which is the most difficult of all to arrange as a dramatic chronicle.

While it is hardly true that Stansky and Abrahams exemplify that blunt candor of the English language which their subject so passionately revered, they have certainly done their homework and drawn their conclusions like honest men. But in the welter of facts, of comings and goings, of changes of attitude and address along the stony road to eloquence, there is a danger that the reader will be left unable to see the doctrinal wood for the incidental trees. It does seem possible that in their eagerness to disclose an enigmatic hero, Stansky and Abrahams have forgotten to draw from Blair/Orwell's story the one profound truth about it which reflects British life with such deadly accuracy. And that profound truth has to do with Class.

Before the transformation, there was Blair the Public Schoolboy, the imperial policeman, the middle-class cynic who thought that hunger meant an empty tuck box after lights-out in the dorm; after the change there was Orwell the social explorer who plunged into the lower depths, who aspired to become one with the people of Jack London's abyss, who went to see how the miners lived, who slept rough and nearly died in a hospital poor ward. *Dégringolades* of this kind are common enough in English social history; what is essentially different about Orwell's case is that he deliberately sought the fall, actively engineered his descent into penury. And it is reasonable to say that through this courting of privation Orwell changed the received truths of his generation regarding certain political matters. For it was his great achievement to be the first polemicist of his time whose perceptions penetrated the flimsy palisades of Ism and Ology to the simple truth that political practice is not linear but curvilinear, that left and right when extended indefinitely do not proceed toward mutually antipathetic millenniums but meet halfway round the curve of lunacy. When the ship of state is a privateer, Orwell seems to be saying, what difference whose ideological flag flutters at the masthead?

This truth was so fundamental, and the honesty with which he stressed it so uncompromising, that it was often too much for the delicate political constitu-

DRAWINGS BY JOHN ALCORN

Benny Green is a frequent contributor to The Spectator, Punch *and other magazines.*

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tions of some of his fellows, men like the publisher Victor Gollancz, who rejected *Animal Farm* because it might offend the Russians, and the *New Statesman*, whose footling and ignoble editor Kingsley Martin refused to publish those dispatches from Spain which dared to suggest that perhaps there might be the occasional anti-Franco man who took pleasure in murdering the occasional grandmother. But what is most fascinating of all, and not generally remarked about Orwell, is that there were times when he too subscribed to the idea that although all truths are equal, some are less truthful than others. And once again, in seeking the wellsprings of Orwell's actions, we are driven back to the comedy of Class.

Orwell had been raised, as Blair, as the child of what might loosely be called the privileged classes, privileged, that is, not to go hungry, not to be turned out into the streets, not to have to look for a job at 12 or 13. Later on, very much later on—for at first he was extremely obtuse about his own situation—he saw that the good works performed on his behalf by his own class had constituted an unfair advantage over others, and that his benefactors were so appalling a crew that anything, even the gutter, was preferable to their patronage. He saw his own kind as cheats and frauds, and recoiling from them with loathing, determined to punish them. He would be their scourge, he would reveal them in all their disgusting corruption. Nobody must be allowed to escape, and there would be no question of disloyalty on his part, because Blair was dead and his place usurped by Orwell. He would, as the saying goes, show them, sometimes at the expense of the facts.

This becomes especially clear in two very curious works of his which today rank among the best-known essays of the century, his famous defense of P.G. Wodehouse and his analysis of those boys' weeklies which published fictionalized accounts of the same Public School life which he himself had once enjoyed. In defending Wodehouse from charges of collaborating with the Nazis on the occasion of the Berlin broadcasts, Orwell made the point that a man like Wodehouse could not possibly have been a traitor because he lacked even the most rudimentary knowledge of the way the modern world worked; in order to switch allegiances, you have to know that those allegiances exist, and it was Orwell's argument that Wodehouse, preserved in the aspic of Edwardian gentility, knew too little of Hitlerite Germany to be capable of truckling to it. "It is nonsense," says Orwell, the man who knows what's what, briskly dismissing the fools and the literary *flâneurs*, "to talk of fascist tendencies in Wodehouse's books. There are no post-1918 tendencies at all." And again, "Nowhere, so far as I know, does he so much as use the word 'fascism' or 'Nazism.'"

Now this essay, which did much to clear Wodehouse's name—at the expense of branding him an idiot—first appeared in 1945, and almost everything has been said about it except the most important thing of all, which is that Orwell did not have the remotest idea what he was talking about. He had been an avid Wodehouse reader in his schooldays, but had evidently lost touch with the later works, otherwise he would have known that in 1938 Wodehouse had published *The Code of the Woosters*, one of the first anti-totalitarian novels by a major English writer, in which Bertie Wooster, confronted by the odious Spode, addresses him in these distinctly post-1918 terms:

> The trouble with you, Spode, is that just because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of halfwits to disfigure the London scene by going about in black shorts, you think you're someone. You hear them shouting "Heil Spode" and you imagine it is the Voice of the People. That is where you make your bloomer. What the Voice of the People is saying is "Look at that frightful ass Spode swanking about in footer bags! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher."

It is hard to say what is the more astonishing about this passage, Orwell's unawareness that it existed, or Wodehouse's refusal to invoke it in his own defense later on when the jackals were snapping at his heels. The same ambivalence turns up in "Boys' Weeklies," that beautifully written, cogently argued and utterly ridiculous essay in which Orwell insists that the comics on sale to the working-class lads of old England constitute a fiendish plot to corrupt their proletarian souls and turn them into lackeys of the ruling class. And having gone this far in his dottiness, Orwell finally compounds it by making one of the best accidental jokes of the period by saying that what Britain really needs is "a good Left-wing comic," even though in Kingsley Martin's *New Statesman* it clearly had one already. In both these essays, which remain an utter delight to read, the truth is beaten into exotic shapes in the service of that rugged, no-nonsense tone through which the lineaments of integrity become a literary mannerism rather than a moral imperative—in which regard Orwell reminds us of Rebecca West, another journalist whose prose assumes an air of messianic infallibility even when indulging in the most speculative fancies.

By the time he wrote those essays, Orwell was already a distinguished figure, feared for his moral courage and respected for his passionate love of lucid prose, for he knew that when precision of language becomes blurred, then precision of moral judgment will soon be imperiled. However, in retrospect it seems remarkable that in order to arrive at this position as the opponent of what he once defined with characteristic olfactory repugnance as "smelly orthodoxies," he had first to become a policeman in Burma. The Burmese episode was indeed the watershed that Stansky and Abrahams say it was, but how extraordinary that he had actually to go there and see blood being shed before he could perceive the possibility that there might be a Burmese here and there who resented the British presence. In the light of Orwell's sanctified status today as a Deep Thinker, it comes as a shock to learn that he had been one of those dullards who need to have omelettes stuffed up their nostrils before they can extrapolate the existence of eggshells; the sad truth is that if every polemicist came to a state of grace only after the personal experience of vileness, there would be no world left to save at all. Orwell's conversion to anti-imperialism in Burma is in fact uncomfortably reminiscent of a later generation of Vietnam veterans who brought home the sensational news that setting fire to people was not after all entirely honorable—all of which illustrates a truth which Orwell came to know very well, that the saving grace of this world is not the experience of the eyewitness supping on horrors but the possession of a little imagination.

The focus always returns in the end to Orwell's guilt over his early exalted status in society, his renunciation of those privileges and the attendant sensa-

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tion of sin in which he luxuriated for the rest of his life. Those who act out this pattern of behavior—and it is significant that most great revolutionary theorists have come from the middle class—die convinced that the poor, on whose behalf they are enduring so much, will be suitably appreciative. The truth is that no such feelings of gratitude ever arise, for the simple reason that if the working class were to admit that the better-off should feel guilty, then what of the only discernible aim in working-class life in Britain for the last hundred years, which has been to escape from the poverty trap? Guilt feelings may exist in Belgravia; in mean streets they were and still are unknown. In Orwell's day there might be eccentric gentlemen who experienced them, but to the working class itself, struggling so desperately to fling aside the very hair shirt which Orwell clasped like a banner to his breast, the whole business would have seemed affected and ridiculous. It might be said, and has been, in Orwell's defense, that at least his heart was in the right place, but that reassuring anatomical bromide implies that his head was in the wrong one, and there is no question that this quixotry was at last to lead Orwell to a sentimentality about the working class, or "the common people," as he often defined them, which was at once patronizing and comically unfair. In order to perceive the nature of this calamitous misconception it is worth recapitulating the facts which Stansky and Abrahams have arranged.

Orwell was the bourgeois child of petty functionaries who bestowed upon him the choicest garland which the establishment had in its power to dispose, an education at Eton. He then becomes an imperial policeman, than which there was no position more derisory of the idea of the Brotherhood of Man. In the course of performing his duties for the Empire, Orwell comes to the conclusion that the class of which he is a member comprises the most detestable people on earth. As a matter of fact he was doing them an injustice, for they were not the most detestable people on earth, only the most detestable people he knew about. Confronted by the deadly alliance they represented of heartlessness and senselessness, Orwell kept his faith by assuming, like Sweet Charity in a reverse situation, that there had to be something better than this.

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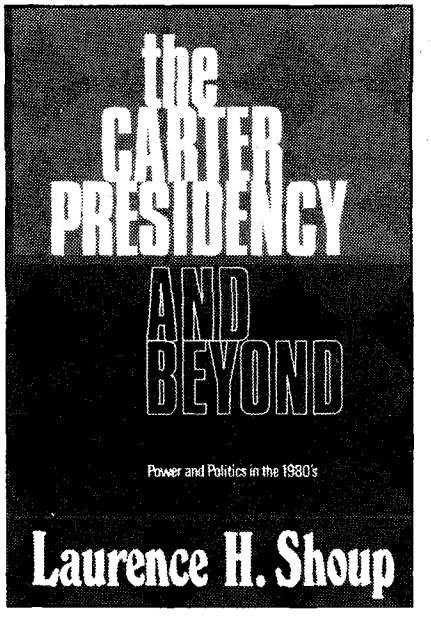

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Now the working class, being the one class of which Orwell knew nothing, was like the one girl in the town brothel whose purity its most romantic customer has never breached, and therefore assumes that nobody else has either. The working class was the salt of the earth, the working class would save England from itself, the working class would build the future, the working class, having been purged in the fires of adversity, *was* the future.

To this colossal false syllogism the British working class itself at the time, had it known of Orwell, would have reacted with a raspberry. Ten minutes in a back street or in a municipal playground would have taught Orwell more on this subject than either Eton or the International Brigade ever could—for as Hemingway very nearly said to Scott Fitzgerald, the poor are neither better nor worse than other people, they are poorer, that is all.

Indeed, the British working class has never had much objection to social disparities, but wishes only to acquire some for itself, which is why its Union leaders end in the House of Lords instead of at the barricades. Orwell's premature death saved him from the disillusion not of megadeath or Airstrip One but of bare breasts and bingo. For in the end, the absence from a man's life of blankets and bread leaves him with less of a passion for revolution than for central heating and Egg Foo Yong, a simple truth which any of the millions of people out there on the cobbled working-class streets of the 1930s could have told anyone who took the trouble to ask.

It was Orwell's tragedy to have an idealistic faith in a class which was not his own, and the tragedy of that class that it could not live up to that faith. And yet, why should it? In ascribing to the common people virtues which no class possesses, Orwell was being ludicrously unfair. Why should the working class, of which he knew nothing, be any better at the elusive art of civilization than the Imperialists he vilified in *Burmese Days*, or the bourgeoisie he flayed so mercilessly in everything he ever wrote? Orwell was not the first middle-class theorist, nor will he be the last, to dream a pretty dream of the sentient masses using their hard-won freedom as an emollient to bind up the world's wounds. It is always a foolish mistake to make, and greatly to Orwell's credit that he should have made it—for the idealist who believes in false gods is sometimes preferable to the cynic who believes in nothing at all. In his essay on Dickens, Orwell suggests that behind the words of every considerable writer there looms the face of that writer's personality, and that the face Dickens presents is of a free intelligence laughing; elsewhere, in "Why I Write," he likens prose to a windowpane. Orwell, too, passes the test of the windowpane of his own prose. The face we see is perhaps not quite as convivial as Dickens's, and certainly not as handsome. But it is lit by the same obstinate glow of humanity. □

Bitter Dispatches From the Third World

EDWARD W. SAID

THE RETURN OF EVA PERON with The Killings in Trinidad. *By V.S. Naipaul. Alfred A. Knopf. 228 pp. $10.*

There is a suggestive scene in one of V.S. Naipaul's early essays that has him in a garden in British Guiana, asking the name of a flower whose scent is familiar but whose name he doesn't know. An elderly lady answers: "We call it jasmine." Then *he* reflects: "So I had known it all those years! To me it had been a word in a book, a word to play with, something removed from the dull vegetation I knew. . . . But the word and the flower had been separate in my mind for too long. They did not come together." A year later, in 1965, he writes that "to be a colonial is to be a little ridiculous and unlikely" and this is directly reflected in the clearly etched but on the whole gentle comedy about being an English-speaking East Indian from the West Indies, as numerous characters (including Naipaul himself) in Naipaul's early prose are. Having the language but with it a different tradition—like reading Wordsworth without ever having seen a daffodil, like the young Hindu in Port of Spain, Trinidad, who "takes up his staff and beggar's bowl and says that he is off to Benares to study"—is part of the same general discordance, "the play of a people who have been cut off."

There are many aspects of this fate which Naipaul has explored in autobiographical as well as fictional terms. His novels, for example, have developed the meanings lying coiled up in his own past, meanings which, like the verbal ambiguities in the word "Indian," don't easily go back to some unquestioned origin or source. Fiction has therefore been that "play" of "adjustments" made when a remembered India fell away for East Indians after World War II: "A new people seemed all at once to have been created," Naipaul wrote in *The Overcrowded Barracoon*, and their life was "like listening to a language I thought I had forgotten [although it] gave that sensation of an experience that has been lived before." But, he adds, "fleetingly, since for the colonial there can be no true return." Nevertheless, there was plenty to explore in the interim, the quite literal fictional space between lost origin and present scene; hence the exotic fun, the sensitive embarrassment, the odd fantasy and creative mimicry of characters from Ganesh, the mystic masseur (*The Mystic Masseur*), to Biswas (*A House for Mr. Biswas*).

Yet the possibility of anger, desperate bewilderment and bitter sarcasm has always lurked in Naipaul's work, because the possibility derived as much from his compromised colonial situation as it did from what, as a result, he wrote about. His subject was extraterritoriality—the state of being neither here nor there, but rather in-between things (like the tropical jasmine and its name) that cannot come together for him; he wrote from the ironic point of view of the failure to which he seems to have been resigned.

Beginning in the early 1970s, however, this in-betweenness occasioned an increasingly bitter and obsessive strain in Naipaul's writing. Consider as a telling case the final section of *In a Free State* (1971). Naipaul is in Luxor in 1966 watching an Egyptian senselessly camel-whipping some poor children, while a couple of Italian tourists film the scene.

Edward W. Said, professor of English literature at Columbia University, is the author of The Question of Palestine *(Times Books),* Orientalism *(Pantheon Books) and* Literature and Society *(Harvard University Press).*

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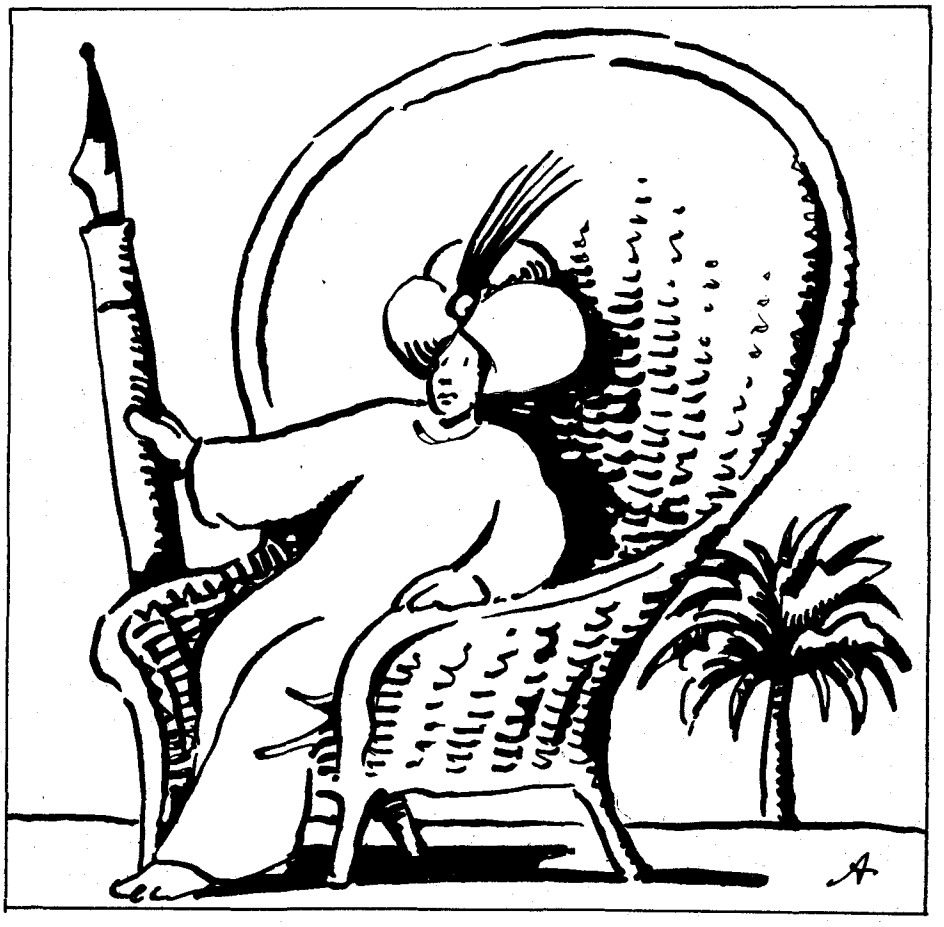
A year later, of course, the June war will break out, so there is something vaguely ominous about the event. Suddenly he makes a decision: he confronts the bully, saying, "I will report this to Cairo," then, having succeeded in stopping the cruelty, he retreats, feeling "exposed, futile." He gets no satisfaction from accomplishing his end because he is haunted by the overall loss of "innocence . . . the only pure time, at the beginning, when the ancient artist, knowing no other land, had learned to look at his own and had seen it as complete." Egypt, like India, or Trinidad, or all the Third World, presents the modern colonial writer with no such innocence or completion, no satisfactory return when he comes back to his roots. Worse yet, he begins to suspect that those roots in "the beginning" were little more than "a fabrication, a cause for yearning, something for the tomb."

Whether the sense of consequently being locked into a world of reflections and inauthentic replicas rests principally for Naipaul on a metaphysical or a political discovery is not an answerable question: what is certain, to the reader of *Guerrillas* (1975) and *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), is that politics and metaphysics support each other. Quite deliberately in the process he becomes a peregrinating writer in the Third World, sending back dispatches to an implied audience of disenchanted Western liberals, not of presumably unteachable colonials. Why? Because he exorcises all the 1960s devils—national liberation movements, revolutionary goals, Third Worldism—and shows them to be fraudulent public relations gimmicks, half native impotence, half badly learned "Western" ideas. Most important, Naipaul can now be cited as an exemplary figure from the Third World who can be relied on always to tell the truth about it. Naipaul is "free of any romantic moonshine about the moral claims of primitives or the glories of blood-stained dictators," Irving Howe said in a *Times* review of *A Bend in the River* (1979), and this supposedly without "a trace [in him] of Western condescension or nostalgia for colonialism."

Not surprisingly, then, Naipaul is the perfect witness for *The New York Review of Books*, where he can be counted on to survey the Third World (with scarcely any other Third World testimony to challenge him), its follies, its corruption, its hideous problems. To say that Naipaul resembles a scavenger, then, is to say that he now prefers to render the ruins and derelictions of postcolonial history without tenderness, without any of the sympathetic insight found, say, in Nadine Gordimer's books, rather than to render that history's processes, occasional heroism, intermittent successes; he prefers to indict guerrillas for their pretensions rather than indict the imperialism and social injustice that drove them to insurrection; he attacks Moslems for the wealth of some of their number and for a vague history of African slave trading, thus putting aside many centuries of majority struggle and complex civilization; he sees in today's Third World only counterfeits of the First World, *never* such things as apartheid or the wholesale American devastation of Indochina. Because he is so gifted a writer—and I write of him with pain and admiration—he can therefore produce such effusions as this from Elizabeth Hardwick (note her elisions, the misleading phrase "lack of historical preparation," which suggests that the Third World's real problem is in not being liberal or white, regardless of how much severer was the "preparation" provided by colonial domination): "Reading his work . . . one cannot help but think of a literal yesterday and today, of Idi Amin, the Ayatollah Khomeini, of the fate of Bhutto. These figures of an improbable and deranging transition come to mind because Naipaul's work is a creative reflection upon a devastating lack of historical preparation, upon the anguish of whole countries and people unable to cope."

The homely intransitive "unable to cope" gives away what the liberal American finds in Naipaul: Africa, Asia and Latin America suffer from self-inflicted wounds, they are their own worst enemies, their contemporary history is the direct result of seeking, but not finding, a suburban bourgeois therapy for their difficulties. But if this is not really Naipaul's epistle to Hampstead and the Upper West Side, what *does* he give? There isn't real analysis in his essays, only observation, or to put it differently, he does not explain, he only regrets sarcastically. His novels are of a piece with this. *A Bend in the River* takes place in an Africa drenched in memories of departed colonialists replaced by an invisible Big Man whose doings are unreservedly irrational and gratuitous. In the meantime he manages



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to unsettle a small group of hybrid Indian Moslems like Salim, the novel's sensitive protagonist, who, with no place to go and nothing to do, see the world taken over by rich Arabs and ridiculous savages. For his portrait of "wounded" India, Naipaul resorts to an almost hysterical repetition of how the place has no vitality, no creativity, no authenticity; read the book's last half and you will not believe that this, in its turgid denunciations of a poor country for not measuring up, is the great Naipaul everyone has been extolling.

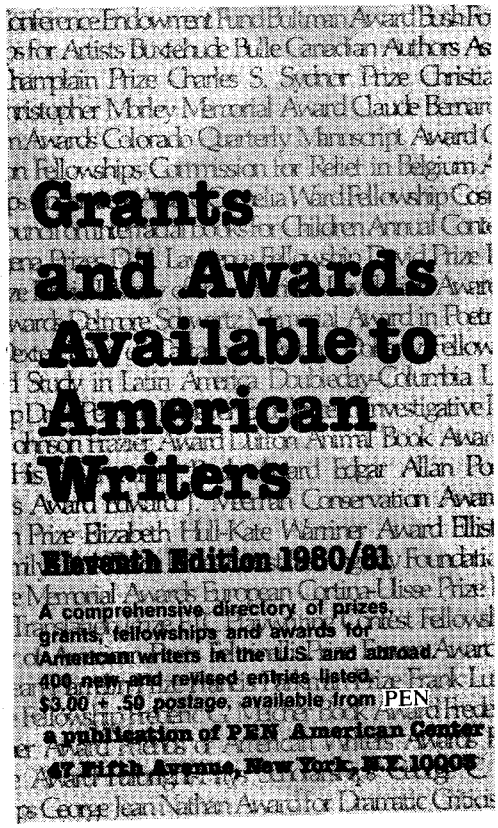
The Return of Eva Peron is mostly a collection of *New York Review* essays (1972-75), all of them, except the last one, which is on Conrad, about debased imitations of some already fallen idol. "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad" is what the novel *Guerrillas* was based on, the story of a black adventurer using black power ideas for his own meretricious ends in a Trinidad where "racial redemption is as irrelevant for the Negro as for everyone else." The result is a bloody climax representing, like Jimmy Ahmed's demise, "a deep corruption" that "perpetuates the negative, colonial politics of protest" as well as the media and public relations hold on things. Whatever perspicacity there is in Naipaul's deft narrative is betrayed, however, by his analogy of Michael X to O'Neill's Emperor Jones, the ravaged and misled Pullman porter who returns to the jungle. His use of Jones's atavism in the essay and in *Guerrillas* neatly disproves Irving Howe's hasty pronouncement that Naipaul contains no trace of "Western condescension." For indeed, Michael X is seen through deeply condescending and offended *Western* eyes, through which slips not even a momentary flicker of compassion.

The similarity in motif between the essays on Uruguay and Argentina on the one hand, and Mobutu's Zaire on the other, is that in all three places the past has vanished, and has been supplanted either by outlandish parodies of modernity or by a vacancy of the sort likely to produce Borges's peculiar epic memories and the Peron phenomenon. What I find revealing is that Naipaul assumes first of all that the only "past" that counts in Africa or South America is essentially European (hence to be regretted for its disappearance), and second, that *all* attempts to deal both with a multilayered past as well as the present are bound to lead to ridiculous mimicry, tyranny or some combination of both. So great has the pressure of Western ideas become in Naipaul that any sympathetic feelings he might have had for the things he sees have been obliterated. There is no life in what he writes about—only hard "lunacy, despair." What is not European can only be borrowed from Europe, further enforcing colonial distortion and dependency. The "great African wound" is somehow equivalent to "the African need for African style and luxury." Sex (always badly handled in Naipaul's work) emerges in Latin America as buggery (*machismo* lovemaking in "the small hole," to use the phrase from *Guerrillas*).

For so assertive and all-seeing an observer, Naipaul is curiously remiss in not having much to say about the role of class in postcolonial societies. Surely more allowances than his must be made for the differences between colonial elites and the masses they dominate. Moreover, there is no good reason for him to avoid comment on the European-American role in Zaire, or in Argentina for that matter. Nowhere in his own reading of the metropolitan West, therefore, did Naipaul establish contact with currents that might have transformed his anger and helplessness into something less constricting, more helpful than bitterness. Instead, he relies on a European tradition of supposedly direct observation, which has always been dangerously quick to elevate disenchanted impressions into sweeping generalization. Used *against* native colonial societies by imperialist-minded Westerners, from Lamartine to Waugh, it has justified racial stereotypes and colonialism. Used by a native against other natives it has tended to produce more dependence, self-disgust, collaboration, apathy.

Finally, Naipaul reads Conrad (who "had been everywhere before me") so as to allay his "political panic." Here was an author who had seen "the new politics [of] half-made societies that seemed doomed to remain half-made." Conrad was "the writer who is missing a society," like Naipaul himself; yet unlike today's novelists he did not give up his "interpretive function" when "the societies that produced the great novels of the past [had] cracked." He goes on *meditating*, again like Naipaul, on peripheral societies making and unmaking themselves. But what Naipaul does *not* see is that his great predecessor exempted neither himself nor Europe from the ironies of history readily seen in the non-European world. Certainly there are African, Asian and Latin American savages in Conrad's novels, but more important, there are Kurtz, and Charles Gould, and of course all the characters in *The Secret Agent*. London, Conrad says in *Heart of Darkness*, is no less a "dark place" than the Congo. No one can draw a self-bolstering European patriotism out of Conrad and claim at the same time to be reading what Conrad *actually* wrote.

That Naipaul does so in effect tells us more about him and his blocked development than any confession. He is in the end too remarkable and gifted a writer to be dismissed; he will be used again, perhaps even by such as Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, when the inconveniences of the Third World are to be attacked. One can be sure that when he travels to the rest of the Islamic world, postrevolutionary Iran in particular will seem as stupid, violent and half-made as Zaire. The more interesting questions are when will his fundamental position become clear to him and when, consequently, will he see himself with less bad faith than he now sees himself and his fellow colonials. Whether that vision can in his case produce a good novel is not exclusively an esthetic puzzle, just as whether he will then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amuse the audience that now regards him as a gifted native informer is also not mainly an esthetic question. But he will, almost certainly, come to fuller appreciation of human effort and he will be a freer, more genuinely imaginative writer along the way. Perhaps then the jasmine and its name will remain apart in his mind at less cost to the poor natives who have been helping to pay his emotional bill. □

Modern Messiah And Provincial Genius

SAMUEL HYNES

THE LIFE OF D.H. LAWRENCE. *By Keith Sagar. Pantheon Books. 252 pp. $17.95.*

March 2 was the fiftieth anniversary of the death of D.H. Lawrence: time enough, you might think, to get his life and works into perspective. His great contemporaries have all settled down into the Modernist canon, and most of them have found the right biographer. But Lawrence's place is still a matter for debate, and after many attempts the really adequate biography remains to be written.

Why such difficulties? Not, surely, the problem so common in modern literary biography of sorting out the facts from the fiction. Of course Lawrence fabulated his own life; but so did Joyce, so did Mrs. Woolf, so did Forster, and *their* biographers have managed to set their stories straight. *Sons and Lovers* is close to life, but no closer than *Portrait* and *To the Lighthouse* are—a representative case rather than a special one.

Is it, then, perhaps his opinions? God knows, some of them are appalling enough—as bad as Pound's. All that stuff about Leaders, and the wisdom of the blood, the evil of democracy and the natural inferiority of women. Lawrence died too soon to know where that kind of thinking led: but *we* know, and so the ideas that he thought were liberating must seem to us simply repulsive. But they are history now, and not likely to engender violent reactions in his readers: we must feel about his ideas as we do about his four-letter words—they're unfortunate, but we've heard a lot worse since.

No, it isn't the art or the ideas, but what he made of them that stands between us and a clear and easy view of Lawrence. While other great moderns were working at being artists, and constructing odd, ramshackle systems of belief to support them in that effort, or moving toward an established church, or trying to get along with no beliefs at all, Lawrence was turning his feelings about man and the world into a personal religion—an incoherent, emotional, authoritarian faith in which he was the messiah, and everyone else was Judas.

We ordinarily regard such modern messiahs as either madmen or charlatans—and recent history confirms the reasonableness of this view. I don't think Lawrence was a charlatan, but there was a stretch of time during World War I and just after when he was certainly close to madness. Lawrence's response to the war was extreme: not compassionate, as one might have expected of a writer who went in for life-affirmation (he doesn't seem to have given much thought to the poor sods in the trenches), but bitter and angry. He saw it as the final insanity of an insane, ugly world, directed at everything that was worthwhile in civilization, but also at himself. You might call it a paranoid reaction—except that he *was* spied on by the English Government during the war, his books *were* suppressed, there *did* seem to be a private war in progress between Lawrence and his own country. And a persecuted man can't have a persecution complex, can he?

Everything that Lawrence wrote during these years is touched by his rage: it runs through his letters and essays like a geological fault, the mark of the earthquake within him, and even his best single work of the time, *Women in Love*, is badly flawed by it. Out of this years-long fit of spleen came Lawrence-the-Messiah, the leader who would bring his followers out of the world's insanity to a new life in a new place. That place had a name (Lawrence called it "Rananim," which apparently means "flourishing"), but it had no location: at various times Lawrence imagined establishing it in Florida, the Andes, the Marquesas, the Abruzzi and Palestine.

Samuel Hynes is the author of The Auden Generation, *and professor of English at Princeton University.*

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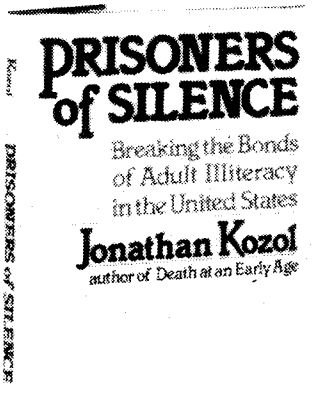
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The energies that Lawrence didn't expend on hating England and the war he put into recruiting for one or another of these havens; Bertrand Russell, Forster, Katherine Mansfield, Ottoline Morrell, Aldous Huxley were all invited. But nobody came, and in the end Lawrence trailed bitterly off with his wife, Frieda, to wander the earth in a restless search for a place that he never found.

The Messiah-Lawrence seems to me both unattractive and sad, a case of a great imagination poisoned from the inside. In his messianic years he wrote virtually no fiction that is worth reading; he had lost interest in fiction, he said, because he had lost interest in people (and he had lost interest in people, one must conclude, because they wouldn't follow where he led). His imagination flourished only when he was writing about the nonhuman world—as in the poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, and when, in his travel books, he could celebrate cultures more primitive than the one he had renounced.

But if the Messiah-Lawrence is a depressing figure, there are other, more appealing Lawrences. There is the novelist-poet of the early years, who wrote two uncontestably great novels, *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*; and there is the frail, touching Lawrence of the last years, after the madness had left him, the author of profoundly moving poems about the death that he awaited, and of his last novel, which he thought of calling simply *Tenderness*, but called instead *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. For the sake of those two lovely writers we can endure the follies of the other, unlovely one.

John Galsworthy once called Lawrence "a provincial genius," and though I'm surprised to find myself agreeing with Galsworthy about anything, I think that in this case he was right. Lawrence's great precursor was Hardy, and like Hardy he was at his best when his work grew from his regional roots. Hardy knew that this was true of himself, and he accepted the consequences—he lived where he had been born, in Dorset, for virtually all of his long life. But Lawrence apparently didn't know it, or couldn't accept it; his England had rejected him, and so he left it, and left his genius behind him. It was still there when he returned in his last novel—a little frayed, perhaps, and a bit shrunken, but still alive.

To call Lawrence a provincial genius on the model of Hardy is to set aside a vast amount of his life's work as irrelevant to his central gift. This is a reasonable and rewarding course for the general reader: you will spare yourself much that is irritating, incoherent, plain boring. But the biographer doesn't have that option: his problem is to be faithful to the whole story—madness, Rananim, politics and all—while not losing touch with that great creative gift at the center. It is a problem that no Lawrence biographer has altogether solved, and Keith Sagar's new *Life* doesn't solve it either. Sagar has recognized that Lawrence really was writing his own life as he went along—a gospel-narrative in novels, stories, poems, essays and a vast number of letters—and he has exploited this rich source, building his narrative half out of his own bricks and half out of Lawrence's. This method has much to be said for it: it reminds us that what Lawrence *thought* was happening is as important to an understanding of his life as what actually *was* happening (it works especially well for the disturbed, messianic years, when Lawrence's obsessions were his reality). But the cost of the method is that we are often left with only Lawrence's interpretation of events, and the line between gospel and fact is allowed to become indistinct.

Sagar has elected to avoid commenting critically on Lawrence's writing, and this, too, seems a wise decision: in general, criticism clogs literary biography without clarifying it. But in Lawrence's case there is perhaps a special problem: all of his genius seems to lie in his work; the life is the obstacle course that he made that genius run. So if you remove the works from the life, what is left is simply a record of the endless, restless wandering, and the endless quarreling—both of which are true parts of the whole, but which don't justify writing about it.

Sagar's book is not only the latest biography of Lawrence, it is also the shortest, and both the length and the form it takes raise questions in my mind. Just what contribution is it intended to make? Is it offered as a new interpretation, an addition to Lawrence scholarship? Or is it, as its format—a thin text stuffed with photographs—suggests, simply an illustrated sketch of the life, a sort of biographical primer? If the former, then I must say that it seems to me to add nothing; if the latter, it is good of its kind, though that kind is not very important.

But even as a primer it is not all it might be. A biographer either reaches for the stature of his subject, or he diminishes that subject; and Sagar's *Life* is a diminishment of Lawrence. The case is, to be sure, an especially tough one—Lawrence did so much in his own life to diminish himself in the eyes of posterity. But at his best he was a great and individual writer, one of those writers who alter and extend our imaginations. We need to be told that that is true; and not only told, but shown how it came to be true, how it was that he was so great a genius, when he was so much that was so much less. □

New Leftovers

TOM SMUCKER

THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING: The Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left. *By Todd Gitlin. University of California Press. 327 pp. $12.95.*

SOON TO BE A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE. *By Abbie Hoffman. Grosset & Dunlap. 320 pp. $12.95.*

COSMIC PROFIT. *By Raymond Mungo. Little, Brown & Company. 175 pp. $9.95.*

Todd Gitlin grinds three axes, and I only care about and know how to judge the effectiveness of two. The first is that the media frame their reporting on insurgent protest groups to fit prevailing power elite wisdom; in particular this was true of *The New York Times*'s and *CBS News*'s coverage of S.D.S. I've always believed as much, and although Gitlin's discussion of the *how* is refreshingly supple and realistic (no conspiracies), it doesn't contain enough inside dirt and detail to really fascinate. (Just where do those beautiful bubbleheads on the local news learn to think the way they do?) But *The Whole World Is Watching* is aimed at thoughtful media types and academics anyway, I assume, not aging, but still opinionated New Leftists like myself. So good luck, Todd, I'm with you! I hope your ax is big and sharp and you help Daniel Schorr scare Dan Rather with your careful documentation.

Tom Smucker writes about pop music and left-wing gossip for The Village Voice.

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Now on to the good stuff.

The second ax is that the sudden glare of the media spotlight and its distortions distorted S.D.S. itself: the need for a news peg made S.D.S. *the* antiwar group even though it was so obsessively multi-issue it had already abdicated the leadership of the antiwar marches to others. Media exposure helped certify S.D.S. leaders and turn them into celebrities in spite of themselves—an unresolvable conflict given the anti-authoritarianism of the early New Left; media-defined leaders had no clear base to account to. The largest membership jumps in S.D.S. were composed of people familiar only with the image of it projected in the mass media; the networks' and newspapers' interest in violence, arrests and novelty (both for sensationalistic and ideological reasons) in combination with S.D.S.'s growing dependency on media coverage for outreach, hastened the move to ersatz revolution and then disillusionment, or Marxist-Leninist marginality.

All this looks so reasonable now but it would have been so hard to swallow back then when the ideal of the selfless revolutionary was fused with the fantasy of international fame, and when electoral politics were considered a corrupt seduction, but dominance of the evening news and the front page were proof of power. Maybe that's why a couple of the examples cited here made me wince.

For instance, poor Paul Booth, an early S.D.S. executive (as was Gitlin), was forced to respond to a right-wing-generated and media-amplified distortion which charged S.D.S. with organizing "treasonous" draft dodging, when in fact draft dodging had only been a proposal. Dropped into the limelight, Booth extricated himself and S.D.S. (by dodging the draft-dodging issue with the "Build Don't Burn" slogan) only to be denounced by other S.D.S.ers as a liberal. And this even though no one could propose an alternative! Those were the days.

And therein lies Todd Gitlin's third ax. A little more camouflaged, perhaps, but just as sharply honed. That is—a defense of the original Gitlin, Booth, Tom Hayden and Richard Flacks S.D.S., the S.D.S. that was overwhelmed by the media and history. Gitlin quite fairly criticizes His Crowd for their lack of organization and their dependence on friendship ties, and gives the catastrophic onrush of late 1960s events their due. But it's the Port Huron Founding Fathers who are quoted in personal interviews and letters, and it's the Early Days of Gitlin's participation which he illustrates and humanizes here. The later media celebs and budding Leninists are quoted at a distance —from documents or books. So that running underneath the narrative is this regret—if we could just get back to the beginning and put it all together again.

My own memories are mixed. Late 1960s New Left leaders who combined Che Guevara with Don Rickles were always trying to humiliate you into doing something scary that on reflection had no definable political logic. But the early 1960s New Leftists too often droned on like professorial but saintly Norman O. Brown Xeroxes, as if they wanted to build a thoughtful world with a new race of Quakers—a doomed project in a country whose religious tastes are more evangelical.

Besides, having once been, long ago, a lonely suburban teen-ager who pieced together an identity partly from watching the *Steve Allen Show*, and having seen others fail with personalities built whole from fantasies of rock stars, I have a lot of curiosity about the power of the human spirit to manipulate the mass media for its own ends. While it may serve Todd Gitlin's needs to limit himself to the print and electronic press, a book about politicos who became celebrities needs to venture into the thorny confusion of talk, game and variety shows, gossip, rock and film stars, sports heroes and soap operas.

We need a meditation on celebrity that doesn't degenerate into a knee-jerk leftist distrust of mass culture. I believe, for example, that "stars" are more cautious about their fame than they were ten years ago, chastened maybe by the deaths of Janis, Elvis, etc. And disco, for a while, was a mass culture craze with no celebrities at all. Without *some* such discussion, it's possible to wonder if Gitlin's distrust of celebrity is actually rooted in the sort of sober disapproval of such ego indulgence that the early New Left was prone to. He tantalizes with one sidetrack—an interesting discussion of the decontextualized violence in pop movies of the 1960s. I only wish he'd left *The Times* and CBS early in the book and polemi-

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cized more freely about the mass media and the left.

But the perspective is essentially correct, as is best shown by his discussion of the Nixon years and Watergate, an era experienced, but barely understood by what was then still calling itself the Movement. There was Nixon trying to tar the by now enormous antiwar movement with a violent image, while the New Left was driven to confirm that violent image and be defined by "violent" leaders in order to maintain its existence in the media. But just then the media, reflecting the ruling-class shift on the war, was trying to elevate a "moderate and responsible" image of the antiwar movement in contrast to the violent one, and at the same time mirror the Nixon Administration pretense that the war news was now the Paris negotiations, not the bombing of Cambodia. Thus, a movement that undervalued, as usual, mass protest, failed to understand the tensions between the media and Nixon (and was naturally completely befuddled when the media revenged themselves with Watergate). And thus the movement also missed the fact that the moment for a violent posture had passed, violence having become the métier of demagogues like Nixon and Agnew. And so, says Gitlin, there was finally no direction left but disintegration.

Abbie Hoffman's new political autobiography, *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture*, charts his rise to fame and fortune as a Yippie who burns out, seeks a private life with wife and child, gets busted and then has to go underground alone. There are lots of interesting tidbits here, but the mythic glue no longer holds. The rise of the Yippie doesn't seem as inevitable now and I kept wondering "How?" and "Why?" through this anecdotal narrative. As always, he's likable and entertaining about the thrill of fame, but seems as ignorant of fame's consequences as Gitlin's critique would predict. Worst of all, he has no better explanation for the end of the 1960s as an era than he has for its beginning. A good analysis of his and everybody's else's burnout is the least such a symbolic figure owes his fans. But Abbie, conveniently, is underground, and therefore not required to make sense of his experiences in the 1970s.

Ray Mungo's chatty ramble about hippie fish canneries, orthopedic sandal wholesalers and organic tea magnates is even thinner in analysis. Somewhere in *Cosmic Profit* there should be an inquiry into what makes work interesting, or the forms the counterculture takes in the world of business. But Mungo still thinks, I guess, that his own experiences stand for larger truths, and that therefore nothing more is required than observation (which he's good at).

And yet, if the failures of these major and minor 1960s celebrities' new books prove Gitlin's thesis, his approach doesn't quite explain why they're still enjoyable to read. Even if Abbie Hoffman didn't understand the media as well as he thought he did, *why* was it so much fun to watch him screw around with it? And why is it still fun to read about it ten years later? Why is Ray Mungo's book so vague yet pleasant? (Why are those pretty bubbleheads on the evening news so interesting?) The answers lie further inside the mysteries of fame, celebrity and mass culture than Todd Gitlin has ventured here.

I've always enjoyed reading old radicals' reviews of one another's books, and I'm thrilled that those of us who identify ourselves with the 1960s had only to wait ten years to pit Todd Gitlin's memories against Abbie Hoffman's. But this is not just like recalling the baseball season in the middle of the winter—there's another thread besides the 1960s running through these three books—the antinuke movement.

Gitlin ends with a discussion of it; Hoffman ends, still underground, with a new name and face, organizing against nuke power locally (which is such a perfect finale mythologically that it made me wonder if he had regained his savvy after all), and Mungo's new bourgeoisie of health food provides much of the cultural context (and a lot of the advertising in the alternate press) for it, even if Mungo is too laconic to explore this very far.

Already, as Gitlin argues, the media are distinguishing between responsible and irresponsible antinuke protest—de-emphasizing, for instance, opposition to nuclear weapons. Already they have had their antinuclear Tet Offensive at Three Mile Island—an event that contradicted official wisdom so severely it temporarily threw reporting up for grabs until a new common wisdom could be worked out. Already some antinukers lust for media coverage as their desires outstrip their power base. Already activists accuse antinuke stars of being out of touch. Already there are "more militant" demonstrations with more symbolic meaning than political goal. Already some antinukers demand instant action from you with apocalyptic desperation.

Gitlin has an explanation for this process that's incomplete but important. If it doesn't gain a hearing, in this or some other form, the revival of the 1960s hoped for by the antinuclear movement may be more precise than anyone desires. And Abbie Hoffman, with his new name and face, may have to go underground a second time. I just wish Todd Gitlin had been able to unearth and shape the forces he desires from the cultural debris around him, as Abbie Hoffman once did. Or at least point toward where these resources might be hidden. □

The Usefulness Of Poets

MICHAEL HAMBURGER

THE SINKING OF THE TITANIC. A Poem. *By Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Houghton Mifflin & Company. 98 pp. $5.95.*

How intelligent can a good poet afford to be? How knowing? How tough-minded? How well-informed? There have been times in H.M. Enzensberger's writing life when these questions troubled many of his readers and critics; and not only when Enzensberger himself posed them in his essays and statements, such as his virtual renunciation and denunciation of poetry in the later 1960s. After his three early collections, published between 1957 and 1964, it seemed for a long time that he had no more use for the spontaneous, personal lyricism that had balanced his public concerns; that the polemicist had taken over from the poet, deliberately and definitively. Apart from a few new poems added to his selection of 1971, Enzensberger remained silent as a poet until *Mausoleum* appeared in 1975; and, however intelligent, knowing, tough-minded, well-

Michael Hamburger, poet, critic, and translator of German poetry, has published many books here and in England.

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informed and accomplished, that sequence was not distinguished by lyricism. If those thirty-seven studies in "the history of Progress" were ballads, as he called them, they were ballads that neither sang nor danced but pinned down their subjects with a laboratory-trained efficiency.

This development remains relevant to *The Sinking of the Titanic*, though in recent years Enzensberger has returned to more personal, even existential, preoccupations in shorter poems, and the new sequence, too, is less rigorously held down to a single purpose and manner. Behind the poetic development—or antipoetic development, some would say—lay an ideological one—from what looked like a revolutionary commitment to the "principle of hope," though it was utopian and independent enough to put no constraint on the poet, through an arduous grappling with the facts of economic, political and technological power, to a general disillusionment with every existing social system and its expectations for the future.

One important stage in that development was Enzensberger's visit to Cuba in 1969. Not only was *The Sinking of the Titanic* conceived and begun there but the Cuban experiences are also worked into the broken narrative of the poem, like many other seeming interpolations, digressions, leaps in space, time and even style. Like most long or longer poems written in this century, *The Sinking of the Titanic* is not an epic but a clustering of diverse, almost disparate, fragments around a thematic core. The main event of the poem, the shipwreck of the *Titanic* in 1912, becomes a symbol and a microcosm, with extensions, parallels, repercussions on many different levels. The *Titanic* is also Cuba, East Berlin, West Berlin (where Enzensberger lived as the editor of a magazine not primarily literary, as a writer in almost every possible medium, for every possible medium, and as the collector of the fragments assembled into this poem), an updated version of Dante's Hell and many other places besides, including any place where any reader of the poem is likely to be. Not content with that much telescoping, Enzensberger also includes historical flashbacks to the fifteenth, sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, all to do with doubts, self-doubts, about art and the relation of art to reality. Other digressions are even more explicit in their questioning of the truthfulness and usefulness of poets and poetry. These also introduce Dante by name, though he is present in the whole poem as a prototype of what poetry can and cannot achieve.

I shall not attempt to list all the many theses and subtheses ironically advanced in the poem, usually to be challenged or contradicted by others, because it is the business of poems to do that as succinctly as possible; yet one brief quotation does seem to subsume the main message:

> We are in the same boat, all
> of us.
> But he who is poor is the first
> to drown.

Characteristically for Enzensberger, that assertion is supported by statistics of the passengers—first-class, second-class, steerage and crew—drowned and saved in the *Titanic* disaster. Much other material of that kind, including a menu, has been drawn upon. The most lyrical, i.e., songlike, canto of the thirty-three in the book—not counting the unnumbered interpolations—is the twentieth, adapted from *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative and Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia*. Documentary collages have been one of Enzensberger's specialties in verse and prose, and they are prominent as ever here, as in the Thirteenth Canto, made up of snatches of miscellaneous hymns and popular songs. Another is the permutation of simple colloquial phrases into puzzles or tautologies, not simple at all, but devastating, as in the interpolated section "Notice of Loss."

Yet the most impressive and reassuring parts of the sequence, poetically, are those in which Enzensberger lets himself go again a little at last, relying less on his bag of tricks—a formidable one—than on the imaginative penetration of specific experience, other people's and his own. A high-spirited, often comically cynical desperation is his peculiar contribution to the range of poetry; it becomes affirmative, if not joyful, in the concluding canto of this poem, a celebration of bare survival.

As for the other side of his gifts, his sheer accomplishment, cleverness and adroitness, one instance of it is his success in translating so intricate and ambitious a sequence into a language not his own. In earlier English versions of his own poems, he allowed himself the freedom of "imitation." This one is a close rendering, with no loss of fluen-

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cy or exuberance, and very little of the idiomatic rightness of his German original. □

Washing The Walls

GERARD COLBY ZILG

BLOOD RELATIONS. The Rise and Fall of the du Ponts of Delaware. *By Leonard Mosley. Atheneum. 448 pp. $17.50.*

When any publisher tells you that "the first deeply researched history" of such famous and powerful people as the Du Ponts is "finally being told in all its fullness and rich detail," your curiosity is naturally aroused. Having had an interest in this powerful clan since 1968, I trudged my way through this 448-page book with a feeling somewhere between hopeful anticipation of new revelations and the fear that this might be only one more example of the clan's 175-year addiction to whitewash. I found that both expectations were fulfilled.

On the more rewarding side, we discover that Henry du Pont, who mercilessly reigned over the Gun Powder Trust of the nineteenth century, stinted on bonus payments for night work and cut costs "even at the risk of impairing safety measures." As for Henry's immediate successors, Eugene and Frank du Pont, Mosley offers a deeper, if not especially objective, probe into their incompetence. His sources for this information, as for much else here, are the complaints of the younger, more frustrated members of the family who took over the company after Eugene's death in 1902. These three cousins, Pierre, Alfred and T. Coleman du Pont, constitute the main characters in the book. Unfortunately, most of their story has been told many times before and bears repeating only if there is more. And there is, but just a little. Pierre, we learn, crushed the "Du Pont" automobile company of his cousin, Paul, because he feared its potential competition with General Motors, which Pierre had seized from Will Durant.

Pierre's sidekick in the G.M. takeover was his personal secretary, John J. Raskob, known in the 1920s as the "Wizard of Wall Street," and Mosley reprints a couple of letters which demonstrate Raskob's professed "love" for his generous "Daddy," Pierre. Such a shameful legacy of self-serving servility is a high price to pay for wealth, but Raskob, unlike Sloan Wilson's man in the gray flannel suit, seems to have had little compunction in his willingness to pay it. It is a corruption endemic to corporate America, yet ultimately unworthy of Mosley's concern.

As you can guess, there is also plenty of family gossip here, most of it tasteless little tidbits about the family's marriage woes (Mosley seems fascinated by extramarital affairs and sexual promiscuity), all cheaply designed to titillate rather than reveal. There is little, I suspect, of interest to those who are not dedicated aficionados of Du Pontiana. Oddly, Mosley's forte is history (he is the author of thirteen books of history and biography) and it is difficult to understand why this book lacks the sort of background material that would give the Du Pont story some historical and social meaning.

Why, for instance, did Mosley choose to ignore the Du Pont Company's role in rearming the German *Wehrmacht* after the Nazis came to power? Why does he skim over Du Pont's deep involvement in international cartels? While he reveals Du Pont's collusion with the Dulles family in its efforts to smuggle German dye scientists out of the French occupation zone after World War I, Mosley does not describe the Du Ponts' collaboration with Allen Dulles in helping to destroy the effectiveness of the 1925 Geneva Disarmament Conference. Nor does he mention Du Pont participation in the Korean and Vietnam wars, in the witch hunts of the 1950s and in the Republican Party's right wing. Even the nineteenth-century sections flatter the family by their omissions.

It doesn't take long to discover that Mosley has also decided to ignore certain social questions. By the time you have read through the first 100 pages of the book you realize that Mosley has omitted information about the lives of the men and women who lived under Du Pont social domination and whose work in the dangerous mills along Brandywine Creek made all that Du Pont wealth and power possible. While he uncritically adopts the corporate rationale for layoffs to protect profits, he casts a blind eye over the speedups on the production line that had much to do with the injuries and deaths from the terrible explosions that were a prominent feature of Du Pont gunpowder making over the decades.

Cheerfully reporting on Du Pont's anticipated need for widows' pensions, he remarks only that the original E.I. du Pont's "foresight [in constructing the mills' roofs and walls facing the creek with wood] had paid off, and though nine men were killed and a whole building destroyed, the other buildings were saved. After the bits of the far-flung dead were scraped off the rocks and rescued from the Brandywine, the grinding went on." So does Mosley's blind eye. He ignores one of the main reasons for Du Pont's obsession with extreme secrecy, which began in the days of the first mills: secrecy allowed Du Pont to isolate its workforce from the rest of the world (especially from information on comparative wages and work conditions); this isolation was conveniently reinforced by the language barrier of its first labor force (French-speaking refugees from Santo Domingo). Secrecy is still an obsession in Du Pont's labor policies as well as in its sympathy with the "national security" arguments of Kissinger, Carter and the intelligence agencies.

But there is almost as much mystery to what Mosley does say as to what he leaves out. Mosley, for example, blames a "lack of enterprise" among Du Pont's competitors in the late nineteenth century for having "encouraged Du Pont's inertia," missing the central point that it is the very noncompetitive nature of trusts and monopolies, such as the Gun Powder Trust created by the Du Ponts after the Civil War, to encourage inertia in an industry. As for Du Pont's antitrust conviction in 1912, Mosley never mentions Alfred du Pont's political maneuvering and threats which persuaded the Taft Administration to ac-

Gerard Colby Zilg is the author of Du Pont: Behind the Nylon Curtain, *published by Prentice-Hall in 1974 (the original $12.95 edition is now available through Probe Publishers, Box 326, New York, New York 10014). He is currently in Federal court suing Du Pont Company and Prentice-Hall for $5 million for Du Pont's alleged successful interference with Book-of-the-Month Club's contract with Prentice-Hall and the publisher's subsequent alleged failure to live up to its contractual obligations to fairly promote and distribute the book.*

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cept Du Pont's transparent reorganization plan—a plan which John K. Winkler long ago described in his *The Du Pont Dynasty* as "one of the outstanding farces of American judicial history."

On a more disturbing note, Mosley simply echoes the late Pierre du Pont II's contention of the company's "neutrality in the effort of preparedness," paying no attention to the company's marching its workers in pro-war "preparedness" parades in 1915 or the family's contributions to the campaign of the pro-war Republican candidate Charles Evans Hughes, later a Du Pont attorney. T. Coleman du Pont, Mosley tells us, "constantly talked about the need to keep the U.S. out of war"; what he does not tell us, however, is that Coleman was a founder of the notoriously pro-war National Security League, and that Senator Henry A. du Pont, an avowed hawk who helped draft the Volunteer Army Act of 1914, even wrote Coleman a letter of support for the league.

In depicting the clan's role during the 1930s, Mosley is no better. He erroneously claims that Pierre withdrew from F.D.R.'s National Labor Relations Board because of the President's failure to balance the national budget. In fact, Pierre filed the N.L.R.B.'s first dissenting opinion, and the dispute was over the board's liberal interpretation of Section 7A of the National Industrial Recovery Act, which guaranteed collective bargaining. It was Pierre's opposition to this right of majority rule in deciding a plant's unionization that led him to resign. Thereafter, Mosley fails to say a word about the family's donations to fascist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and the Sentinels. Nor do we hear about G.M.'s labor upheavals, including the Flint Sit-Down Strike and the murderously anti-union Black Legion, when the company was under Du Pont management.

Du Pont evasion of inheritance taxes is lauded here as the source of all those wonderful Du Pont foundations that preserve family estates for "the public," ignoring their role as tax-sheltered holding companies controlling billions of dollars in assets, including corporate securities which give the Du Ponts enormous national influence.

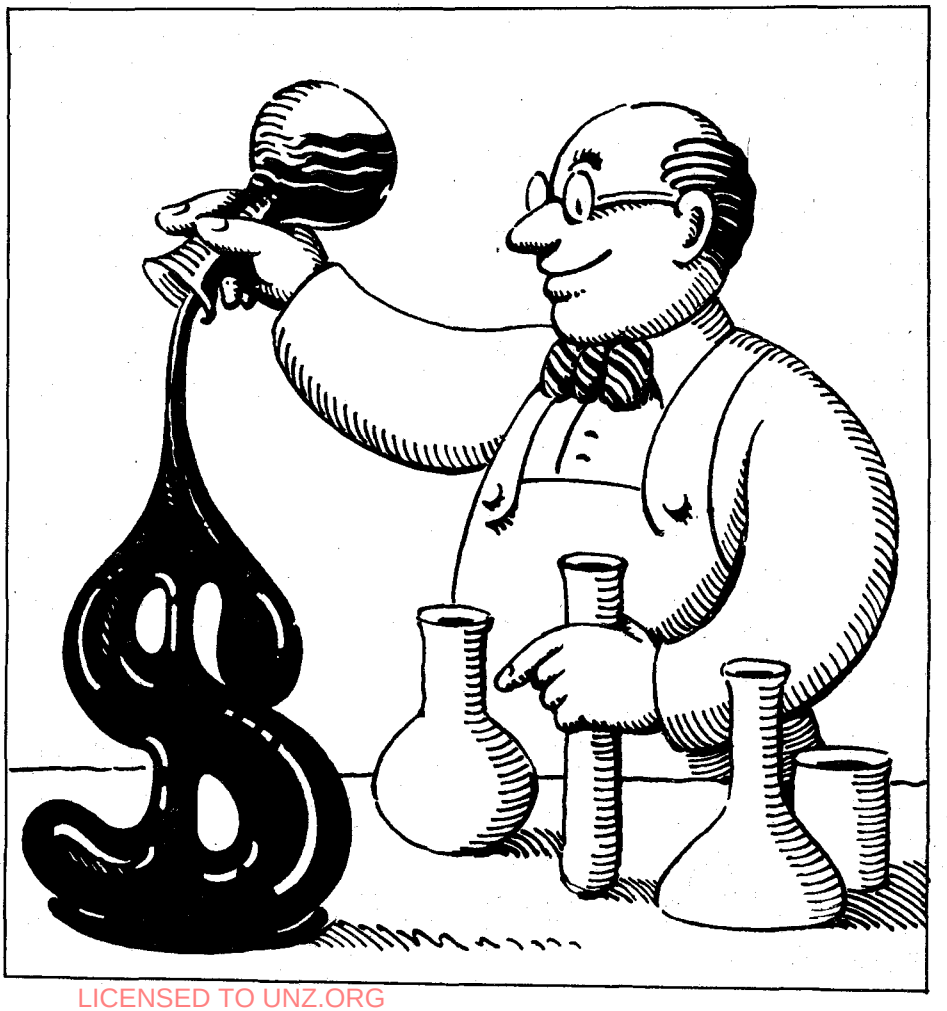
Lammot du Pont Copeland's pledging of Christiana Securities stock—"the family's most closely guarded treasure"—to two labor unions as collateral for more than $7 million in loans for his bankrupt son, is aptly pointed out as "painful as losing a limb" for the family. But Mosley fails to connect that with the family's decision to dissolve Christiana a year or so later. In fact, he ignores the dissolution altogether and its crucial role in helping the family spread its investments beyond Du Pont Company.

Sins of omission and commission continue to follow each other in the narrative. In discussing Irving Shapiro's rise to the chairmanship of Du Pont, much is made of Shapiro's poverty-ridden background and its positive effect on the liberal image the company craves. Mosley follows the company's lead in rewriting history by omitting Shapiro's role as a McCarthyite witch hunter during the 1940s when he served as a successful Federal prosecutor, convicting the top eleven leaders of the U.S. Communist Party under the Registration Act—an action described by Harvard Law School's Prof. Zachariah Chafee as "the most drastic restriction on the freedom of speech ever enacted by the United States during peace."

This and other deletions from the record, despite Shapiro's "talking very frankly over a long period about his company and its family connections" (for which Mosley is so thankful in his Acknowledgments), raise basic questions about the book's credibility: what else has been omitted by Mosley? It is not enough for Mosley to establish trust by referring to "the Du Pont tradition of whitewashing the family chronicle" and admitting "gaps" in the family library's records due to deliberate destruction by Du Ponts; nor is it sufficient to cite his own case of being once denied reproduction rights to a letter that showed how cruel Pierre du Pont was to his wife. Surely some research independent of family archives and cooperation is called for.

Perhaps the most telling consequence of Mosley's dependence on the Du Ponts is his contention that Du Pont is no longer a family-controlled firm—a contention the company maintains. To prove it, he ends *Blood Relations* by stating:

> By the mid-1970s, with Irving Shapiro as chairman of the board, there were two thousand du Ponts living in and around Wilmington, but not a single one was on the board of directors or a member of the planning committees.



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In fact, the Du Pont Company has eight family members on the board of directors (Irenee du Pont Jr., Edward du Pont, Lammot du Pont Copeland, George P. Edmonds, Crawford Greenewalt, W.W. Laird, Hugh R. Sharp and Charles McCoy, whose brother-in-law is a Du Pont), and six of these dominate the almighty Finance Committee.

If there were nothing more to the Du Ponts than the sort of bedroom gossip Mosley reveals, they would not be worth the effort of writing a book. Yet there is little more than bedroom gossip in Mosley's account. So why, one might ask, did Leonard Mosley choose to invest the time and energy writing this book? And why were the Du Ponts so helpful? (We do know that the Du Pont Company did not warn the Book-of-the Month Club that Mosley's book might be actionable, as it did with *Du Pont: Behind the Nylon Curtain*; in fact, *Blood Relations* enjoys B.O.M.C.'s blessing.) One can only wonder . . . and remember the manner in which the Du Ponts hid the blood of workers that were killed in explosions along the Brandywine. They would repaint the bloodstained walls of the gunpowder mills with a wash. I'll leave it to you to guess the color. □

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Where "The Waste Land" Ends

CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

SCRIPTS FOR THE PAGEANT. *By James Merrill. Atheneum. 235 pp. $11.95. Paper. $6.95.*

First, in 1976, *Divine Comedies*, containing *The Book of Ephraim*. In strong pentameter, James Merrill at once made clear what it was: not at all the usual thing in form or content, but the "Book of a Thousand and One Evenings Spent/ With David Jackson at the Ouija Board/ In Touch with Ephraim Our Familiar Spirit." The poem's material would be the carton of messages spelled out over twenty years to Merrill and his friend at their house in Stonington, Connecticut, by the dime-store cup which pointed to the board's twenty-six letters. Spelled out to them or by them? Do they follow the cup or guide it? Questions of which Merrill is never unaware, and to which he himself can give no final answer. Imperceptibly, however, they recede in importance as the poetry takes over; by the end of *Ephraim* disbelief has long been suspended.

Ephraim was followed two years later by *Mirabell: Books of Number*. JM and DJ (as the board's capitals identify them) were still at it. The letters now spelled out, instead of messages from departed friends and the gay revelations of Ephraim, giddy Greek, more difficult lessons, imparted by a crew of red-eyed, red-hot bats who identified themselves by number. They "describe themselves now as fallen angels, now as volatile subatomic particles; the scale, accordingly, wobbles throughout, from vast to microscopic." (The authoritative explanatory prose quoted is Merrill's own, not part of the poem, but prefaced to an excerpt published in last summer's *Kenyon Review*). The new familiar is 741; he and JM and DJ become as fond of each other (and he of them) as they did of Ephraim, so that everyone is delighted when he metamorphoses into a peacock and changes his numerical designation for the name they give him, Mirabell—M's having, for Merrill, multiple mana. Mirabell's realm is the complex of mathematical formulas that frame? support? explain? express? the macro- and microcosm of physical and human nature. He speaks often of GOD B—Biology.

Mirabell's "main fields," writes Merrill, "are History and Science, often much mythologized."

> Thus we are told of an Arcadian Atlantis whose immortal denizens resembled centaurs and themselves created the bat-angels to serve them. It didn't work. Two rival worlds—one electrically, one atomically powered—ended in mutual destruction. It would be for Man to reconcile those opposites. . . . [Mirabell's] visits prepare us for a seminar with the Angels —whose 25 lessons are in fact the marrow of the third volume.

Merrill lets the ouija board itself set the poems' structure. *Ephraim*'s reveals itself gradually: twenty-six sections, beginning with successive letters of the alphabet. *Mirabell*'s is immediately apparent, as befits what the bat-angels asked Merrill to provide, POEMS OF SCIENCE: ten parts, each subdivided in ten, and numbered from 0 to 9.9. After letters and numbers, there remained on the board YES, NO and the ampersand—the manifest of the reconciliation of opposites assigned to Man.

Man, God and the cosmos. High talk. How softly and seductively *Ephraim* began, then, we only now realize. That was the kindergarten, Merrill tells us, for the school of *Mirabell*, and for the Angels' seminar of these final *Scripts for the Pageant*. YES & NO. White and Black, Matter and Antimatter, Life and Death, two scripts for a future performance. Between them we, as readers and as human beings, are left to choose. JM wants that perfectly clear; he asks, and is answered in capitals. "We do the judging? Everyone? INDEED."

Tentative in title, cannily ambiguous in structure and content, these *Scripts* are no more ambiguous in spirit, no less committedly affirmative, than the *Paradiso* to which they are already being compared. How otherwise, when the first of the trilogy appeared initially in a book called *Divine Comedies*? And as the reviews appear, the comparisons accumulate: *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, Proust. Sober critics, some themselves

Clara Claiborne Park's essays and reviews have appeared in Hudson Review, The American Scholar *and* The Washington Post Book World.

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poets, reach for the sky: Blake's Prophetic Books, *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, the *Comedy* itself. Recalling these in scope, however, the trilogy is like none of them in manner. And the manner is the matter, Merrill being a supreme mannerist.

Yet the matter is no less substantial for that. To have the poem now completed is like the reception of an immense, unhoped-for present: the long poem that it's been proved a hundred times over we can't expect in this age of anxiety, privatism, fragmentation and the loss of the confidence and will to speak any public language. In *Ephraim* Merrill had already brought off something miraculous enough—eighty-nine pages of solid poetry. So we thought, not yet able to glimpse the grand design (though it was there). *Mirabell*, transitional, was longer still (182 pages); the bard suspended our hopes but did not disappoint them. Now *Scripts* is nearly half as long again. At its completion Merrill, like Prospero, breaks the mirror that has been since *Ephraim* the symbol of his poetic field, as well as what it was in actuality, the central focus of the room where his spirits gathered. He does not drown his book, however, but leaves it for us to read and live with.

"James Merrill has created a poem as central to our generation as *The Waste Land* was to the one before us." So Phoebe Pettingell in *The New Leader*. If so, our generation is in luck. Might Eliot's long legacy at last be spent? The trilogy is sufficiently unlike the literature of the last sixty years, the best and the worst, that we need have no trouble recognizing its differences. In the midst of fragmentation, it unifies—science and poetry, past and present, public and private, cosmic and domestic, the dead and the living—as epic used to, as no short poem can. In the midst of literature (and lives) made out of heartsick discontinuities, it is continuous, with the continuity not only of reason—purposeful narrative, tightly connected event—but of the heart—of loyalty, friendship, of love that so yearns for continuity that it seeks it beyond even that black discontinuity that JM and DJ refuse to take as final. In the midst of personal and linguistic privatism, it manifests for the reader an affectionate concern that we'd forgotten could exist in serious literature, and a shining faith in the power of language to render shareable our grandest imaginations and our most personal experience, to make the private public.

Public, not popular. These Divine Comedies (as must not the final, three-part assemblage eventually be called?) will not be that. But they will reach that same enduring public that learned its way to sharing Dante's experience—not the credulous, the Castaneda-freaks and horoscope-watchers to whom its apparatus initially might seem to appeal but all those who care enough about the pleasures and responsibilities of life and language to do the work (and play) of reading a poem extraordinary enough that its author well might think—as Dante and Milton thought—that in some decisive way it came from Somewhere Else. And if it didn't, Merrill's flipped coin still comes up heads. What a piece of work is man, out of whose hot and busy brain heaven, purgatory and paradise can spin themselves?

YES & NO. This is the final message. *Scripts* is both the gayest and the darkest of the three volumes. SUDDEN FIREWORKS OF PLEASURE, spells one of the calm Angels, thinking about man's life and not quite understanding it. He might have been talking about the experience of reading these poems. Certainly the language here dazzles against the dark. It also, as appropriate, glitters, glistens, glimmers, glints, or glows, as well as bringing off a great many other special effects I lack alliterative verbs for. The lines are crammed with jokes and puns, Olympian *jeux d'esprit* in several foreign tongues plus dialects of English. Examples? Hopeless to quote; it is in context that the words light up. Perhaps these lines (from *Mirabell*, 9.9) on Hell? Hell is

> (a syllable identified
> In childhood as the German word for *bright*
> —So that my father's cheerful "Go to Hell,"
> Long unheard, and Vaughan's unbeatable
> "They are all gone into a world of light"
> Come, even now at times, to the same thing.)

Certainly the gleam is gone. Yet this casual parenthesis, thrown into the midst of a sentence on its way to somewhere else, which I picked out merely because it was self-contained and illustrated a pun, demonstrates how inseparable Merrill's wordplay is from his highest seriousness; only as I write do I perceive that it manages to embody what the

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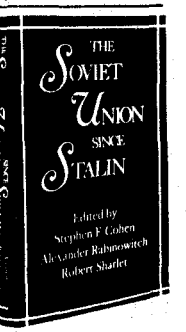

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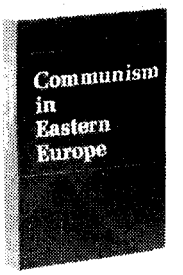

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whole poem is about: brightness and death, the loved human being and the flashing revelations of language.

And the verse! "Make it new!" Merrill can do anything with these old forms we've been told so often are outworn. This poem should reinstate the study of prosody in the English curriculum. Sonnets crystallize so effortlessly out of his narrative pentameter that we often don't realize we're reading them. Like *Ephraim* and *Mirabell*, *Scripts* has its terza rima canto, ending, for a flourish, with Dante's key word, "stars." Each order of creature speaks in his appropriate meter. Throughout *Mirabell*, the bat-angels manifest their numerical nature in the tuneless syllabic fourteeners they speak in. But when Mirabell himself sweeps into the splendid farewell fête of *Scripts* in full peacock fig, transfigured into "blue, green, gold, a comet-streak," his fourteen syllables have been transfigured too; now divided into eight and six, his lines are rhyming tetrameter and trimeter. Mortals, dead and living, speak in pentameter. The Angels' verse is free and ample. The unicorn from Atlantis, four-footed, speaks in the four-beat alliterative line of *Beowulf*, as befits an early creature, but rhymed and speeded up to match his light canter.

Like the peacock, the unicorn is enchanting—one of the many delights and surprises of this last book. But the magician, the poet-Prospero, controls all meanings; the flying bats, the pterodactyls of the early world, it turns out, are a metaphor for THE BLACK VOLATILE HALF of the atom, followed, MINUTES ONLY AFTER THE BIG BANG by THE FIRST NUCLEI OF HELIUM, which are stable, DEPENDABLE, . . . FOURFOOTED—like the unicorn creature of Atlantis. The enchanting creatures have been transformed—into the irrefutability of metaphor.

"But," JM asks, "if it's all a fable,

Involving, oh, the stable and
unstable
Particles, mustn't we at last wipe
clean
The blackboard of these creatures and their talk,
To render in a hieroglyph of
chalk
The formulas they stood for?

The answer comes from W.H. Auden in the spirit world. He speaks for all poets:

WHY MAKE A JOYLESS THING
OF IT THROUGH SUCH
REDUCTIVE REASONING?

Merrill has not done so. The celestial elevator swoops up and down through all the levels of meaning. But Merrill knows the trick—or truth—of Dante's allegory: that all the levels must be founded on the literal, in which we live. The poem's ultimate gaiety is the most serious of all—the daily life and affection of DJ and JM over twenty-five years, celebrated in this volume with a silver anniversary party, and of their families and friends, beloved beyond death.

YES & NO. The text of YES is naturally affirmative, propounded by God's favorite, Michael, Angel of Light and the Air which makes light visible: THE MOST INNOCENT OF IDEAS IS THE IDEA THAT INNOCENCE IS DESTROYED BY IDEAS. Paradise is gained, not lost, by the work of intelligence. Yet in the last of these ten lessons of light a new, strange voice is heard. God's voice is lost in darkness. The mirror-field is "bitter-black and vast." The god who set life's cosmic enterprise going is signaling to unknown brother gods in the galactic emptiness a song even the angels cannot hear. But humans can; its lonely, persistent permutations are the song of life.

I AND MINE HOLD IT BACK
BROTHERS I AND
MINE SURVIVE BROTHERS
HEAR ME SIGNAL ME . . .
ALONE IN MY NIGHT
BROTHERS I AND MINE
SURVIVE BROTHERS DO YOU
WELL I ALONE
IN MY NIGHT I HOLD IT BACK I
AND MINE
SURVIVE BROTHERS SIGNAL
ME IN MY NIGHT
I AND MINE HOLD IT BACK
AND WE SURVIVE

"Song of the blue whale," asks JM, "alone in space?" Or (in an exquisite lyric moment) God seen in all the vulnerability of the human. From *Tristan*, Act I,

ONE SAILOR'S CLEAR
YOUNG TENOR FILLS THE HOUSE,
HOMESICK, HEARTSICK—
God himself in need of comfort.

After that, the five lessons of &, the central section, connect (of course) and relax. A dazzling sestina is at once a hymn to the four elements of the four Archangels—Earth, Air, Water, Fire—and the Chronicle of DJ's and JM's perfectly real trip from Athens to Samos. It introduces the arrival in the beyond of dear friends whose death the poem has already prepared for. George Kotsias, doctor and scientist, is a specialist in cell biology; Robert Morse is a gifted amateur from Stonington, from whose wrists (*Mirabell*, 8.8) "fugue by fugue Bach's honeycomb/Drips . . . then whoops! the Dolly Suite." Fire is GK's element; it is he who explains about helium and stable and unstable particles. Light-minded TINY BOB, his element Air, slips disconcertingly in and out of E.F. Benson baby-talk, but he is one of those whose joking, like JM's own, is a way to cope with the dark without denying it. "Barbarity," JM will say later, "To serve uncooked one's bloody tranche de vie." Grownups do not ask for sympathy. Grace under pressure, if you like, though that's the phrase of a shade Merrill does *not* call up. "Style" is Merrill's word for it, which can turn, "in mid-sentence . . . iron to sunlight."

Now Merrill's four main human contacts with the universe are in place, one for each element; RM and GK have joined Auden and Maria Mitsotáki (Earth and Water), known already from *Ephraim* and *Mirabell*. It is they who, with JM, junior poet, and DJ, the faithful Hand on the cup, hear what's inaudible even to angels. And WHA voices the message of these middle lessons: EQUIVOCAL NEWS of mankind trembling ON A CRUST SO FRAGILE/ IT NEEDS GOD'S CONSTANT VIGIL TO KEEP US AFLOAT. It is a measure of the power of Merrill's elegantly established light-mindedness that he can make WHA ask the big, simple question straight out, rendered no whit less serious by a poet's pun:

THEREFORE I SAY OF THIS OUR
FRAGILE EARTH:
IS IT DOOMED? IF SO, WILL
OUR LINEAGE, OUR LINES
MEAN MUCH, LOST IN A
POLLIWOG SEA OF ATOMS?

But as the lessons of YES contained NO, so NO makes room for YES. The negative text to Michael's affirmative is proposed by Gabriel, Angel of Death, his element Fire and the atom's own dark power, if not black antimatter itself. This text too is equivocal: OF ALL DESTRUCTIVE IDEAS THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE IS THE IDEA OF DESTRUCTION. Do we ignore in death and destruction their constructive function? Ideas indeed destroyed the

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Garden, but were we meant to stay there? Maria, plant-lover, water-nature, nurturant Muse and Mother, pleads eloquently for Man. WE COME, WE MORTALS, FROM AN AVID WEED/ CALLED CURIOSITY. God and Nature in all they do have shown that they WANT THESE SECRETS OUT, so that WE, MANKIND, may DO IMMORTAL WORK, to save the future and perfect it. And if EARTH BECOMES PARADISE, greedy mankind, OUR RACE OF THIEVES, will be justified, like Prometheus, who stole heaven's fire for man's good.

So the poem proceeds, a succession of songs of creation and destruction—individuals and species and civilizations destroyed, buried, but over them (and this in the lessons of NO) A WREATH OF GREEN STRONGER THAN ANY BLACK. GOD B sings all alone, and his words close the poem:

> . . . I ALONE IN MY NIGHT
> HOLD IT BACK HEAR ME
> BROTHERS I AND MINE

But the permutations are new, and they take on new meaning in this final context. God's eerie decasyllabics subside to mortal pentameter; we realize that the lonely song of survival is our own. It is MAN who MUST PROVIDE and, in the poem's recurring phrase, MAKE SENSE OF IT.

And the sense we make is anchored in the personal life that takes place daily on this fragile earth on which past all believing the cosmic mystery has placed us. Jimmy and Dave and their manifold affections—their friends, their cat, their wallpaper, their carpet, their mirror, have sustained the whole cosmic pageant, as if (strike that; why hedge?) to affirm the truth: that the cosmic imperatives, LOVE, SURVIVE, rise out of our own "undestroyed heartscape," and that if they have no roots in our personal experience they have no roots at all. YES or NO? When JM, at sunset in the house in Athens, the spirits dispersed, the whole incredible enterprise over, leans over the balustrade to look down at the three-story drop and feel the urge that is so simply gratified, we know what must HOLD BACK the night if anything can, when DJ comes wordlessly to take his place beside him.

Enough. Too much, in fact. This is too rich a poem for review; commentators will be at work for years to come, MAKING SENSE OF IT. But we are in at the beginning. So forget all this, get the books, and make your own discoveries. Readers these days have a hard enough time guarding the virginity of their responses from the aggravated assaults of critics. All too soon the snow will be trampled under our heavy boots. Get to the poem before it's taught in the academy, as in five years' time it surely will be. Start with *Ephraim*, of course, and move to *Mirabell*; this one can't make its sense unprepared for. But buy these *Scripts* now. It can't hurt to salt away a first edition. □

American Literature's Little Big Man

MICHAEL MALONE

NEIGHBORS. *By Thomas Berger. Delacorte Press. 275 pp. $9.95.*

Q: Who's Who in the East *quotes your remark, "In my work I have tried to compete with that reality to which I must submit in life." How do you mean that? As opposed to showing reality up for what it is?*
Berger: *I mean exactly what I say. My interest is in creation, not in commentary. Those who believe my* intent *is to criticize society, to satirize, to write spoofs and send-ups, to be that most humorless of scribblers, the so-called comic novelist, are utterly misguided. I write for the purpose of providing myself with an alternative to reality. . . . Nevertheless, be prepared to read many reviews of* Neighbors *that confidently announce my success or failure at holding the mirror up to suburban society and blithely ignore the truth that the book is about dying.*

With new major writers and new monumental epics debuting in every Sunday's ads, the hucksters have hyped our critical currency so high that we are hoisted, when talking of a novelist like Thomas Berger, into a stutter of hyperbole. For Berger, with ten remarkably various books to his credit,

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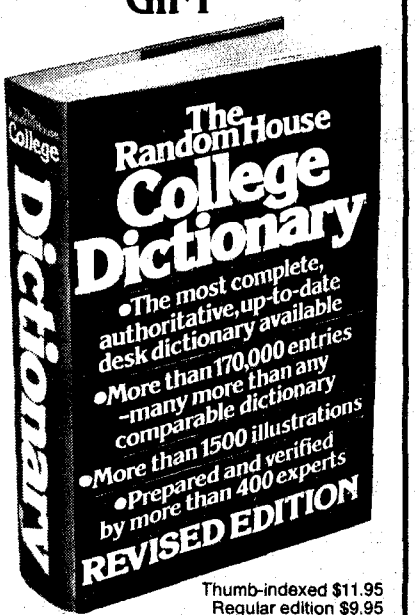
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is the real thing: a major Major Writer. Unlike his contemporaries Norman Mailer and Joseph Heller, however, he has only a minor major reputation and remains best known as the author of *Little Big Man*, his third novel, the only one to bring him a wide national audience (the movie starring Dustin Hoffman) and the laurel of a national prize (the Rosenthal Award). His first novel, *Crazy in Berlin* (1958), came too late and was too wry to hold the audience swept up by *The Naked and the Dead*; it came too early and too earnestly to gather the cult that Heller won with the 1961 publication of his World War II fiction, *Catch-22*. Besides, *Berlin*'s protagonist, Carlo Reinhart—who returns in *Reinhart in Love* (1962) and *Vital Parts* (1970) is not the ordinary stuff of fictional heroes, being neither shiny with fey innocence like Holden and Garp, nor romantically awash with poignant disenchantment like Jake Barnes and Dick Diver, nor fetchingly nuts like Yossarian.

Mailer and Heller cometed into the firmament with their first novels; they have stayed there ever since. Berger, conversely, has never been a star in the literary skyline of New York, and although no one at work in this country writes better than he does—and precious few write anywhere near as well—his books are far less likely to appear on a reading list for a course in contemporary fiction than, say, the seriously flawed and finally sentimental *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

For novelists, two traditional paths lead to the top of Parnassus, and Berger has traveled neither. The first is through the groves of academe: Those, like Joyce, whose works solicit, indeed demand, critical exegesis in order to be appreciated are naturally enough those taken up by scholars, who need literary material to deconstruct just as doctors need patients to diagnose. Among novels in the school of so-called "black comedy" to which both Heller and Berger have been ascribed, the text of choice these days is Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon, already the subject of full-length scholarly books, announces his "significance" by a polysemous allusiveness, thematic opacity and an occasional soar into high lyric flight. Berger, for all his perceived "cerebral brilliance," *appears* to be more accessible, and is therefore not taken as seriously.

The second and more acclaimed approach is the romantic path: These are writers whose books are variations on a central, personal mythology, writers who are inextricably fused in the public mind with their works; as with a movie star, Norman Mailer's writings are mirrors to reflect whatever myths he stands for. The most popular of the major writers are likely to be of this biographical, "Byronic" variety—as were the triumvirate Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Wolfe, all of whom were brought to fame, significantly, by the same editor, the also mythologized Maxwell Perkins. Among suggestions as to why Thornton Wilder never became such a star, Malcolm Cowley points out how different from one another all his novels are, in time, in social setting, in form. We can observe the same decentralization in Berger's books, and with the same results, for this kind of range and impersonality make it difficult for critics and readers to "get a fix" on a writer. A constant sensibility, choosing among styles and structures, is less readily extracted than a constant theme or authorial persona.

Critics have agreed since *Crazy in Berlin* that Berger is "one of the finest writers alive," one of the "living greats," one of "a small group of important American writers," but they have been uneasy about defining exactly in what this greatness resides. John Hollander, usually more articulate, wrote that *Vital Parts* "reads like some kind of masterpiece." What kind? What is most immediately evident about Berger is that he is a writer who loves to write (not always the case with writers). He has said that he's at work not to expose or change the world but to provide himself with an alternative; he writes for the sake of creation. We can trace his trying out, with obviously exuberant relish, the possibilities of his craft, of that amorphous something called prose narrative: Fantasy parable in *Regiment of Women*, the science fiction of a futuristic society in which traditional sex roles are reversed—with no better results. The genre of the police novel in *Killing Time* with its flat sharp sheen; in it the crime and punishment of an insane (or deific) murderer are presented with the detachment of the lens on a *film noir* camera. The chivalric romance of *Arthur Rex*, his twentieth-century adaptation of the Camelot legend—as Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is the nineteenth-century adaptation. The American epic of *Little Big Man* (our Indian wars are our *Iliad*) with its ironic *eiron* of a narrator in the great national vein of Twain.

The critical line on Berger has always been that he is a satirist with a keen sense of the ludicrous who offers us a "bleakly comic account of the world's malevolent absurdity" (Kenneth Graham). When faulted, it is generally by critics who think him nihilistic, or see his cleverness as flippancy. "He cannot resist drawing almost anything he happens to know into the circle of his ridicule." This charge by Leslie Fiedler, that Berger is a joker without "moral earnestness," is utterly false, but it underlies the not infrequent and equally false conclusion that *Arthur Rex* and *Little Big Man* are *parodies* of their subject matter. Berger has written only one parody, the irrepressible spoof of the Hammett/Chandler private-eye whodunit, *Who Is Teddy Villanova?*, which plays with language as merrily as Mozart played with notes.

Berger is a writer of comedy, in the true, generic sense of the term. And as such he returns to chivalric England and to the Cheyenne of the Old West not to mock either romance or the past but

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May 4—James Munves exposing the Kent State Cover-Up
May 11—George Vickers on the Sectarian Left
May 18—Arthur Samuelson on Israeli Censors
May 25—Joel Rogers and Tom Ferguson's Election '80 Commentary

The Nation broadcasts, scheduled to coincide with the publication of a related article in *The Nation*, can be heard

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because these subjects give him access to the themes that are his generic concerns. If Berger could be said to be talking about anything, beyond his formal interests, I would suggest that more basic than his coincidental satire are his (*1*) war with time, (*2*) yearning for human "rightness," that is personally and communally harmonious, and (*3*) a baffled love of women in uneasy tension with idealistic aspirations about manliness and realistic despair about sexual politics.

Berger goes about comedy's business choosing life, communion and order by killing time; it is difficult for him to locate this social harmony in contemporary settings. In such communal atemporality, the Indians of *Little Big Man* live naturally.

Among white men who "live in straight lines and squares," Little Big Man is prey to all the psychic dislocations of fallen man. Among Indians, he can feel, though rarely and never wholly —Berger does not romanticize primitivism—when "looking at the great universal circle" of the sky, that he is "at the center of the world, where all is self-explanatory." He has a place in the circle of the divine comedy.

Nothing could be further from that circle than the sorry cul-de-sac of suburban development where Earl Keese lives the last twenty-four hours of his never-lived life that comprise *Neighbors*, Berger's perfectly paced and inescapably disturbing tenth novel. The unneighborly way Earl's new neighbors, Harry and Ramona, treat him is as maddening as the way fate treats Jude the Obscure. They are boorish and abusive and obscene, and like characters in a Beckett or Ionesco play, talk non sequiturs with a terrible inconsequentiality that has even more terrible consequences.

Earl sees Harry thumbing through his checks, Ramona lying naked on his bed, he sees *pimp* painted on his car window. Or maybe he just thinks he does, maybe it's all an aberration of perception, maybe a dream, maybe madness—either his or Harry's and Ramona's. Earl's wife, Enid, behaves as incomprehensibly as the new neighbors; in her sealed verbal universe, she is as ineluctable to him as women always are to men in Berger novels. He suspects (as in *Sneaky People* Buddy suspects that his wife Naomi's "bland exterior" is a "mask for corrosive sarcasm") that Enid may have joined in some diabolic conspiracy to undo him. She appears to be accusing him of trying to rape Ramona, of trying to rape Harry. She appears to be in bed with Ramona. Earl's daughter appears to be in bed with Ramona. It appears that appearances are deceiving, that seeing is not believing.

Neighbors is a flawlessly crafted morality play; constructed out of the most subtle minutiae of perception and expression—as if Henry James had written *Waiting for Godot*—it must be read literally, but cannot be read realistically. Berger reminds us that the truth has very little to do with reality anyhow: King Arthur "was never historical, but everything he did was true." This is the last line of *Arthur Rex*, and, we are told, "the moral of the story." The moral of *Neighbors* is in its last line—"Earl, it could happen to anybody," Ramona says to the hero as he dies, after having finally chosen to drive off with them. In some sense, I would wager, Harry and Ramona mean death —obtrusive, unceremonial, irrational, boorish, banal and inescapable. No one will help Earl elude them, any more than Everyman's friends can help him avoid death. Against them he fights the first real fight of his life, against Ramona's seductions and Harry's brutality. But death wins in the end. Death always does. "I know I sang a different tune at first, but I was totally misguided. Actually Harry and Ramona are probably the finest people I've ever met. It just takes a while to perceive their unique quality, but once you do, you're not the same."

Without the gaiety of *Teddy Villanova* or the sweep of *Little Big Man* or the tenderness of *Sneaky People*, *Neighbors* may be easier for some to admire as a dark, brilliant artifact than to enjoy as a narrative. It is stripped of the sentiment which is essential to fictions that reach wide enough for popular success, sentiment that Berger evokes effectively in, for example, *Arthur Rex*. Besides, it is the fashion to hand the largest wreath of laurel to a large book, rather than a small perfect one like *Neighbors* or *Gatsby*, and so it seems unlikely that this book will gain Thomas Berger that nation of readers his talent deserves. *Neighbors* is his *Confidence Man*. His *Moby Dick* is still to come. □

DRAFT FORUM
Co-Sponsored by *The Nation*
New York University
May 5, 1980
2:00 P.M.
Loeb Student Center, Washington Square South, New York City

Overcoming Success

THEODORE ROSENGARTEN

SLAVE AND CITIZEN: The Life of Frederick Douglass. *By Nathan Irvin Huggins. 224 pp. $9.95.*

The man born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey wrote his autobiography three times. In 1845, seven years after escaping from slavery and changing his name, Frederick Douglass published the first of his life stories. The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* quickly became the most widely read and quoted weapon in the arsenal of abolition.

Douglass wrote the *Narrative* at a

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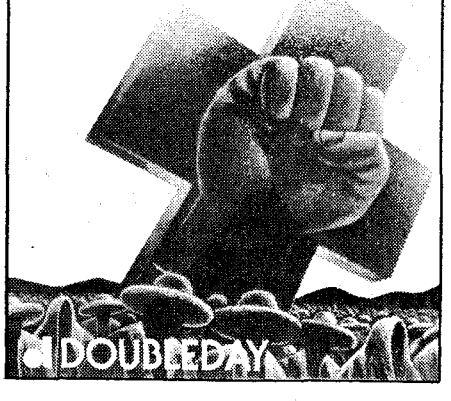
DOUBLEDAY

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time of personal crisis. He had grown so eloquent in the cause of antislavery that his listeners ceased believing he had ever been a slave. He sounded too learned, too white, too superior. So, to conquer their doubts and throw fuel on the fire, he related the details of his twenty-one years in bondage, cautiously omitting the facts of his escape.

In 1855, he added to his story and brought it up to date, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Here, in the slower-paced, more analytical style of a man no longer on the run, he studied slavery in depth, as it affected all social relations, going well beyond his own case. By this time he was famous and safe, his freedom having been purchased for him by British friends, his reputation for truth-telling indisputable.

Yet it was another time of crisis for Douglass. His efforts as a speaker, writer and editor seemed to bring slavery no nearer to an end; the cause of abolition remained immensely unpopular. Now he found himself splitting, on principle, with his former patron, William Lloyd Garrison, and the Garrison faction of abolitionists. *My Bondage and My Freedom* can be read as a statement of the self arrived not only at freedom but also at independence, at freethinking.

In 1882, when the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* appeared, Douglass was living lavishly on a handsome estate "with a twenty-room Victorian house" overlooking Washington, D.C., where he worked in various Government appointments. His status as "leader" of his race was taken for granted at all levels of society. In other words, he had made it big. But the cost of making it in the white man's world was terrible. You could hardly name a man who, by every economic and social index, lived in greater isolation from his people than Douglass.

Douglass did not fail to see, or feel, the disparity. Black Americans were growing poorer, not richer; their political rights were ebbing, not increasing. Hopes Douglass had nourished during Radical Reconstruction were dead. Until the Civil War it had been easy to pick out your enemies—slaveholders, slavery-supporting churches, politicians in the pay and influence of slavery. Later in the century the targets were more difficult to personify—racism and ignorance in the population at large and a shrinking impulse in society to reform itself.

For Douglass, society's crisis was his own. He had always been a reformer, a man concerned with injustice in all of its forms, not slavery alone. He had spoken out for world peace, women's rights, temperance, prison reform, repeal of capital punishment; and, in Britain, for Irish freedom and against the infamous Corn Law. Douglass had a hand or a voice in all the great issues of his day. His *life* and his *times*, as he and his audience saw them, were one and the same. Nathan Irvin Huggins is correct to call Douglass's life story "his greatest asset." Not only because it sold well and continues to sell but because it has been immune to fluctuations in appraisal.

Douglass has enjoyed many biographers. Huggins, in *Slave and Citizen: The Life of Frederick Douglass*, notes with appreciation the works of Benjamin Quarles and Philip Foner. These three historians agree quite closely on Douglass's character. The full agenda of Douglass's life is known. Imagine, then, my initial resistance to Huggins's book. Another biography—what for?

Yet the book won me over. Brisk, romantic and brief, it grasps the fundamental biographical problem, the personal life struggle of an exceedingly public man. Life histories usually show us how people grow up in their families and communities, becoming adults capable of meeting expectations which everybody shares. But in Douglass's life, Huggins demonstrates, each step to maturity took him further out of the orbit devised for his people and further into a hostile culture. To succeed, most people need to transcend losses; Douglass needed to transcend his ascendance, to overcome the temptations of wealth, fame and privilege.

Sometimes he failed, as when he hung around Washington in the 1870s waiting for some high-level political appointment that never came. Instead, he filled ceremonial posts or remote diplomatic offices. Was this the best use of his talents, or was Douglass seduced by self-esteem and the prospect of honors? You might not share Huggins's conclusion, but the evidence is sufficient to allow you to judge for yourself.

To say Douglass failed is to say he acted as a mortal, that at times he put himself first or put the cause of his people ahead of the needs of other people. For persecuted peoples, as for crabs in a bucket, the way out is sometimes over the backs of others. Nobody wants to wait his or her turn to be liberated. In the struggle over the Fifteenth Amendment, giving black men the vote, Douglass broke with his longtime allies in the women's suffrage movement. With tact and simplicity, Huggins describes the painful moment. Douglass's friends, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, asked the great reformer "to make a single cause of suffrage for blacks and women." Douglass refused, because "to do so would be to lose everything." He insisted "it was 'the Negro's hour' "—1869—"and that his rights had to be secured first."

No amount of argument or elocution could convince the women. While noting their profound dissatisfaction, Huggins hesitates to censure Douglass. Instead, he turns the discussion to the racism latent in the women's movement —a sad element of the women's fight for political rights. By balancing Douglass's indefensible position with the shame of the women's movement, Huggins gives the impression that, somehow, the two wrongs cancel each other out. Furthermore, Huggins applies a double standard. Douglass is forgiven for abandoning principle to reach a goal, but Lincoln, say, is vilified for bending with the breeze in the slow pursuit of his goals. Neither man's mistakes need detract from our judgment of their essential missions, but if you insist on purity from one, you had better insist on it from the other.

Lincoln is the villain of this book. Huggins rates him a "mean and grudging" man whose "ambivalence" toward slavery had a devastating effect on the morale of blacks. Who is this Lincoln Huggins has in mind? Certainly not the man who regarded slavery as a "skunk" and a "tumor" and who railed against it, in his soft way, his whole political life. I can only guess that Huggins has confused Lincoln with James Buchanan.

Still, for a first acquaintance or a reacquaintance with a brilliant black American, *Slave and Citizen* suffices. It provides a reliable summary of an astounding career, and if it advocates, denounces or begrudges too loudly, it gives a feeling for the mood of the country, for the character of the time itself, that comes closer to the heart of what happened than any chronology of events. □

Theodore Rosengarten is the author of All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw *(Alfred A. Knopf).*

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FILMS

ROBERT HATCH

Soupçon
Serial

In Paris, François and Brigitte Dupuis announce on the occasion of their twenty-fourth wedding anniversary that they have decided to part company. To their shocked children they explain that, having married young, they never really enjoyed the opportunities of independence and have long dreamed of tasting such pleasures.

In Marin County, across the bay from San Francisco, Harvey and Kate Holroyd are somewhat breathlessly pursuing the life of higher consciousness—at least Kate is pursuing it; Harvey is put off stride by a stubborn conviction that people who conceptualize have given up trying to think. As a result, their marriage is subject to frequent meltdowns.

It would be hard to invent two couples with less in common than the Dupuis and the Holroyds, and the films that present them belong to two quite different genres: *Soupçon* is a gentle, sentimental comedy; *Serial* is a frenetic satire. But it comes to the same thing in both stories—a loss of enthusiasm for monogamy. And both films offer the same reassurance—fidelity is the best policy.

The Dupuis, for all their unassuming ways, are the more daring pair. She owns a small dress shop, he is a locksmith (irony, no doubt, intended), and in France people of their sort don't make a joke of marriage. In fact, the humor of *Soupçon* stems a good deal from incongruity: it is almost impossible to imagine the prudent, conscientious François (Jean Carmet) as a vagabond, or the level-headed Brigitte (Marie Dubois) as a layabout. Jean-Charles Tacchella, who wrote the picture and directed it, keeps his story light and sweet by permitting his adventurers to meet only people as nice as themselves. They jump off and on the merry-go-round and never get hurt, nor do they hurt anyone else. As I said, *Soupçon* is sentimental. However, they do discover what people as conspicuously sensible as themselves should have known from the start—that after a quarter-century of satisfactory marriage, one's expectations are fairly well set, so that even the most attractive of new partners will prove an implausible bedmate.

This is a fragile fiction, and not a particularly original one: it succeeds because Carmet and Dubois are so good in their parts. They convey with sunny good humor the situation of two people who understand each other only too well and themselves hardly at all. It is a picture that beams with benevolence, which is not what you might expect from the director of *Cousin, Cousine.*

Except for its conclusion, and the weather in which it was shot, there is nothing sunny about *Serial.* It is directed by Bill Persky from a novel by Cyra McFadden, whose purpose it was to pin a flight of trendy West Coast but-

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terflies to a specimen board. The film, like the novel, is a cartoon strip of social idiocies derived from fad versions of ecology, organic food, group psychology, Eastern religion, functional architecture, sexual equality, progressive child rearing and love of animals—all marshaled, one way or another, in the cause of adultery. The Holroyds, spinning anxiously in the maelstrom of commercialized fulfillment, nevertheless emit reassuring sounds of sanity in what would otherwise be unrestrained bedlam. For one thing, Harvey speaks intelligibly, whereas the rest of the community verbalize computer output; and Kate, when their daughter joins a love cult, has the wit not to rejoice.

It is a funny movie, if an exhausting one. And though it is difficult to satirize what is already a caricature, the fact that Marin County has been crying libel suggests that *Serial* has at least nicked its target. The cast is too large to name and, generally speaking, dashes about too promiscuously to be clearly seen. Peter Bonerz is splendidly repulsive as a snake-oil psychoanalyst and Tom Smothers is ethereal as a spaced-out clergyman who wears a headband for want of a halo and officiates at pair bondings. The plot is advanced by a motorcycle gang. □

THEATER

HAROLD CLURMAN

Morning's at Seven
The Haggadah
Sunrise/Peking Man

Paul Osborn's *Morning's at Seven* (Lyceum Theatre) is delightful: it ranks as one of the best American comedies. I remember seeing it when it was first produced in 1939; I liked it then, but it was not a success—it ran for only forty-four performances. It will be a hit now. I point this out to remind those who tend to forget it that immediate success or failure is no warrant of excellence or proof of the lack of it.

Perhaps the play's insufficient "draw" in 1939 was due to the social climate of the day; it is a sunny piece and we were just then becoming uncomfortably conscious of the Nazi threat and the possibility of a war in which we would become involved. Then, too, the production at the time—though good—may have not been as telling as the wholly admirable present one.

To be somewhat glib about it, we might speak of *Morning's at Seven* as Chekhov on an American back porch. The play is situated in a small Midwestern town in the period preceding the Depression. Chekhov too wrote of ordinary people in the provinces, though of a more favored economic position with, to be sure, a much richer cultural-historical background than Osborn's folk. There are intellectuals among Chekhov's characters, but none in *Morning's at Seven*, except for a retired college professor who is bluntly contemptuous of his wife's ignorant family. She is one of four sisters, one of whom is an old maid and another the mother of a 41-year-old son.

They are hardly a contented family but they have much less awareness of what troubles them than do Chekhov's Russians. Carl Bolton, who is married to the oldest of the four sisters, torments himself with the conviction that he is a dud. He aspired to be a dentist but he never became one. Somehow he took the wrong turn. He often succumbs to mental crises when he puzzles over the loss of his identity. In this mood, he is given to leaning his forehead against walls or trees.

The Boltons' son, Homer, has for six years been going with Myrtle Brown, a 30-year-old woman to whom he has never had the gumption to propose marriage. He is apparently overattached to his mother. Like his father, he is baffled by his inanition and seems destined to the same muddle-mindedness.

None of this gives any idea of the odd, homespun humor and affectionate understanding of the author's treatment of the material. What does emerge, however, are two features: these people are thoroughly normal and basically sound and, more important than this, they are capable not only of decency and kindness but of a surprising waywardness of behavior, the causes of which they do not comprehend, though we do. These characters have a fundamental innocence in spite of all the frustrations, aberrations and imbecilities—the tokens of our common humanity.

Morning's at Seven is in every sense an American comedy; not merely typical of its time and locale but of "the smiling aspects of life," as William Dean Howells once said. With all their upsets and eccentricities, the characters remain both funny and real: we are always conscious of what makes them our kin. There is nothing smug or superior in Osborn's attitude toward them, as there often was in that of our writers of the 1920s, when there was a tendency toward the derisive or cruel concerning a supposedly benighted rural population.

The entire cast deserves plaudits. Certainly this is so of Elizabeth Wilson as the repressed yet inquisitive unmarried sister. Nancy Marchand is darling as the benign and simple-minded sister. With sympathy, we observe the pain and forbearance of Teresa Wright as the dissatisfied one. Maureen O'Sullivan has a reassuring sturdiness as the well-adjusted sister. And Lois de Banzie is altogether winning as Myrtle Brown, the least demanding person in the play, even in the face of her long wait for a proposal from Homer.

The men of the tribe are also capital. Maurice Copeland possesses a natural heartiness as the constantly benevolent husband whose sister-in-law once loved him with ardor. Richard Hamilton is both pathetic and funny as the nuttiest of the clan. Gary Merrill is cool, dry and ironically thoughtful as the former professor and family sage. But I find special merit in David Rounds for his remarkably varied characterization of Homer, in protracted peril of losing his manhood.

Special honors are due the director, Vivian Matalon, who has guided the cast with scrupulous care. The cast as a whole plays with the cohesion of a first-class chamber ensemble.

Congratulations to Elizabeth Swados. *The Haggadah* (Public Theater), is the narrative of the Jews' enslavement in Egypt and their exodus and liberation under Mosaic leadership. This "Passover Cantata," adapted, composed and directed by Swados, might be described as ecumenical. The splendid company is composed of white, brown and black players, Jews and gentiles, who speak and sing in English, Hebrew and Yiddish with equal conviction and authority. There are some excellent voices and the diction, in the main, is what it should be.

Swados, moreover, has the honesty to acknowledge the invaluable contribution not only of the members of her company but also of the varied and inventive use of settings, costumes, masks and puppets, all designed by Julie

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Taymor. The show is supported by five enthusiastic and well-trained musicians.

There are striking images and devices in the staging: the use of a long silk sheet to suggest the crossing of the Red Sea and the drowning of the Egyptians, the hair-splitting arguments around the *seder* table (during which the use of puppetry is especially effective), the collaboration of two children, ages 9 and 12. The music, slightly jazzed-up versions of Yiddish and Hebrew melodies, is always engaging. And if the religious reverberations of the story are not particularly awe-inspiring, they still add to the festive atmosphere. It is all fun, *theatrical* fun, achieved through meticulous work, technical skill and a healthy spirit. Leaving this *Haggadah* one feels good—which is not always the case at some other such (real-life) celebrations I have attended.

I was interested in productions of two plays by the 70-year-old Chinese dramatist, Cao Yu, a pioneer in Western-style spoken theater (as opposed to the classic Chinese drama, which is sung). The two plays, *Sunrise* (1936—presented at La MaMa Experimental Theater) and *Peking Man* (1940—at the Horace Mann Theater, Broadway at 120th Street, under the auspices of the U.S.-China Arts Exchange of Columbia University) were absorbing. The casts were comprised of East Asian actors (Chinese, Japanese, Malaysian, Korean, some of American birth and education), and, on the whole, the disparity in their national origins did not disturb the impression of unity.

The plays are realistic in style and in content. *Sunrise* pictures the decadence of Shanghai, a decadence in which everyone becomes a victim of moral indifference, greed and lack of economic and cultural coherence—the falling apart of an ancient but no longer viable society. Tisa Chang, a Chinese woman, directed.

Peking Man, a more complex piece of broader scope, portrays a Chinese family going to pieces in its futile effort to maintain traditionally aristocratic ways under the chaotic capitalism of the 1920s—before the revolutionary thrust and upheaval.

Both plays, as presented, were sufficiently convincing, though *Peking Man*, directed by Kent Paul, an American, was favored by ampler stage facilities and was therefore more impressive. □

Norman Birnbaum, Blair Clark, Ramsey Clark, Fred Cook, Terrence Des Pres, E.L. Doctorow, Richard Falk, Jules Feiffer, Tom Ferguson & Joel Rogers, Frances FitzGerald, James Goodman & Dorothy Samuels, Philip Green, Christopher Hitchens, Leonard Kriegel, Robert Lekachman, Penny Lernoux, Sanford Levinson, Carey McWilliams, Aryeh Neier, Marcel Ophuls, Nora Sayre, Robert Sherrill, Calvin Trillin, Kurt Vonnegut, Alan Wolfe **write it.**

John Alcorn, Marshall Arisman, Tony Auth, Seymour Chwast, Robert Grossman, Frances Jetter, Ed Koren, David Levine, Lou Myers, Ed Sorel **illustrate it.**

Victor Navasky **edits it.**

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A SEARCH

Educated, college and seminary, in two of his church's best schools, there followed for a certain man something of a successful pastorate, until he became convinced that though churches (lodges, schools, clubs, etc.) were doing a good job, it was not good enough for our present times. But if that was not good enough, what was? He must try to find out.

If answer was to be found, it could best be found working among the people. He left his church as member and minister. Trained for no other trade or profession, and a family man, he at first could only do odd jobs. Later came steady work with minimum pay.

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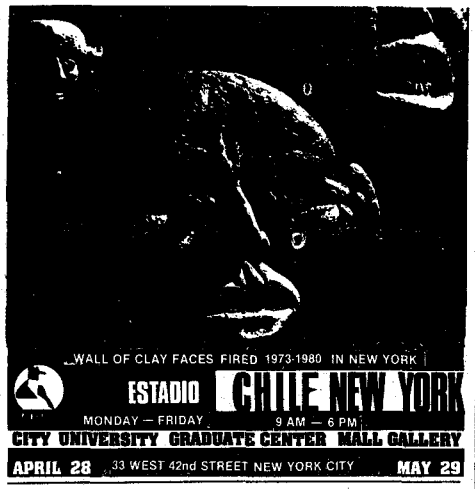
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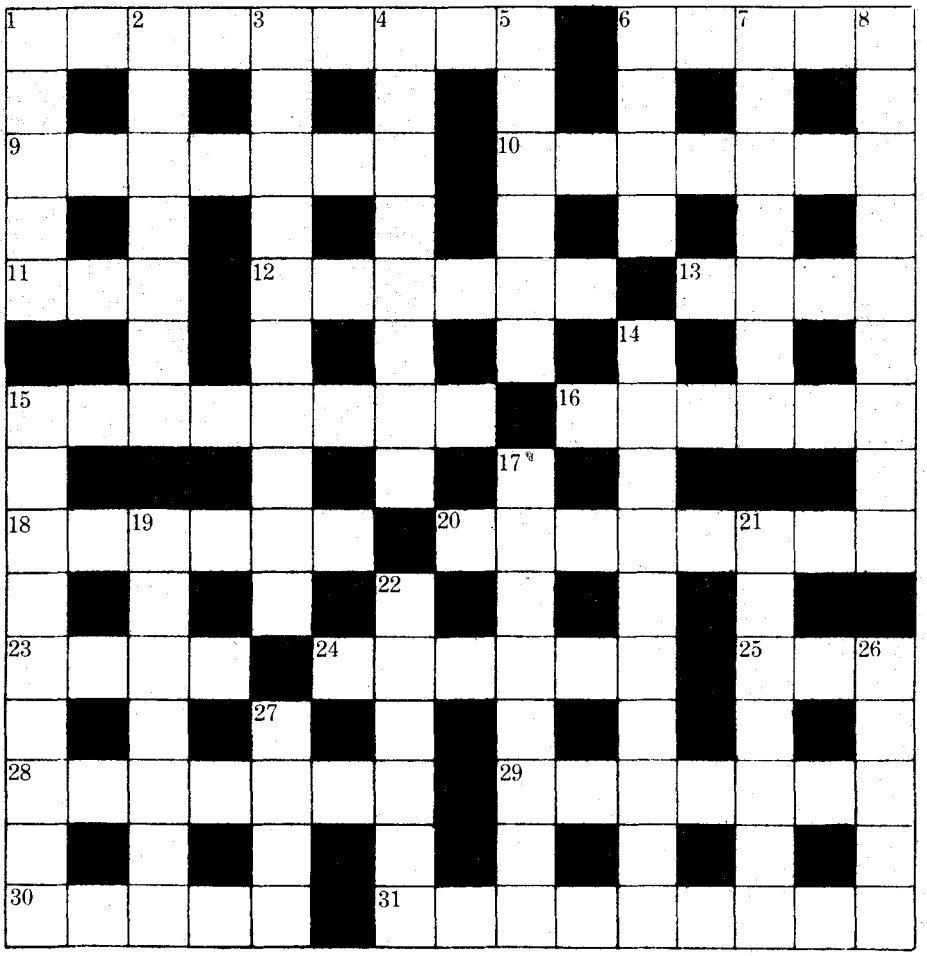

ACROSS

1 and 6 What the chairman might do with a folding yardstick that won't work, for example. (4,3,2,5)
9 Pertinent point to the Teuton. (7)
10 See 22 down
11, 12 and 13 Precept applicable to the reign of Elizabeth, according to some? (3,6,4)
15 Bad taste shown by Sen. Kennedy, for example, declared to be correct. (8)
16 Elf-picture in Tasmania? (6)
18 See 3 down
20 What a keyed-up person might try to do back-to-front? (How some animals smell!) (4-4)
23 A Dickens character doesn't have to choose a cord for burning. (4)
24 See 30 across
25 and 28 Some people use a strong club, but it's dangerous-looking. (10)
29 The ruins of Agra and Alhambra associated with it. (7)
30 and 24 The character of Lewis at last might support 10. (5,6)
31 One legal right in the remainder rebounding. (9)

DOWN

1 Is it never the wrong way to turn? (5)
2 French seaport, with nothing French, but a lot around it. (7)
3 and 18 across A-pealing sort of fruit. (7,3,6)
4 Having such colors might not be a happy occasion. (3,5)
5 One you might encourage to eat more quickly. (6)
6 What Georgy-Porgy ended up having. (4)
7 With a car, dual-shift shows the proper count. (Stoker got some of us fired up with it.) (7)
8 With this sort, a deep crest is highly thought of. (9)
14 Koko was taken from one. (That's where flirting got him!) (6,4)
15 Everything can be charged, evidently, if it's permitted. (9)
17 Wine gets better with time. (They involved carrying things in U.S. and Canada.) (8)
19 One for the road—Cain or Abel by implication. (7)
21 With certain flat equipment, you have to put air in. (7)
22 and 10 across Flashing lights and unexplained bleeding, for example. (6,7)
26 Meat of a sort. (5)
27 Familiar ending of a stretcher, in truth! (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1818

ACROSS: 1 and 14 Washer-drier; 5 Brush-up; 10 and 11 Balance of power; 12 Sky-blue; 13 Scratch; 16 Overdress; 18 Replanted; 20 Bosom; 22 Bestrew; 24 Nonplus; 26 Orion; 27 Greenhorn; 28 and 29 No great shakes. DOWN: 2 Allay; 3 Handler; 4 Reeled out; 5 Buffs; 6 Umpired; 7 Howitzers; 8 Parches; 9 Abased; 15 In passing; 17 Endangers; 18 Rubdown; 19 Arrange; 20 Bonanza; 21 Musing; 23 Wight; 25 Loose.

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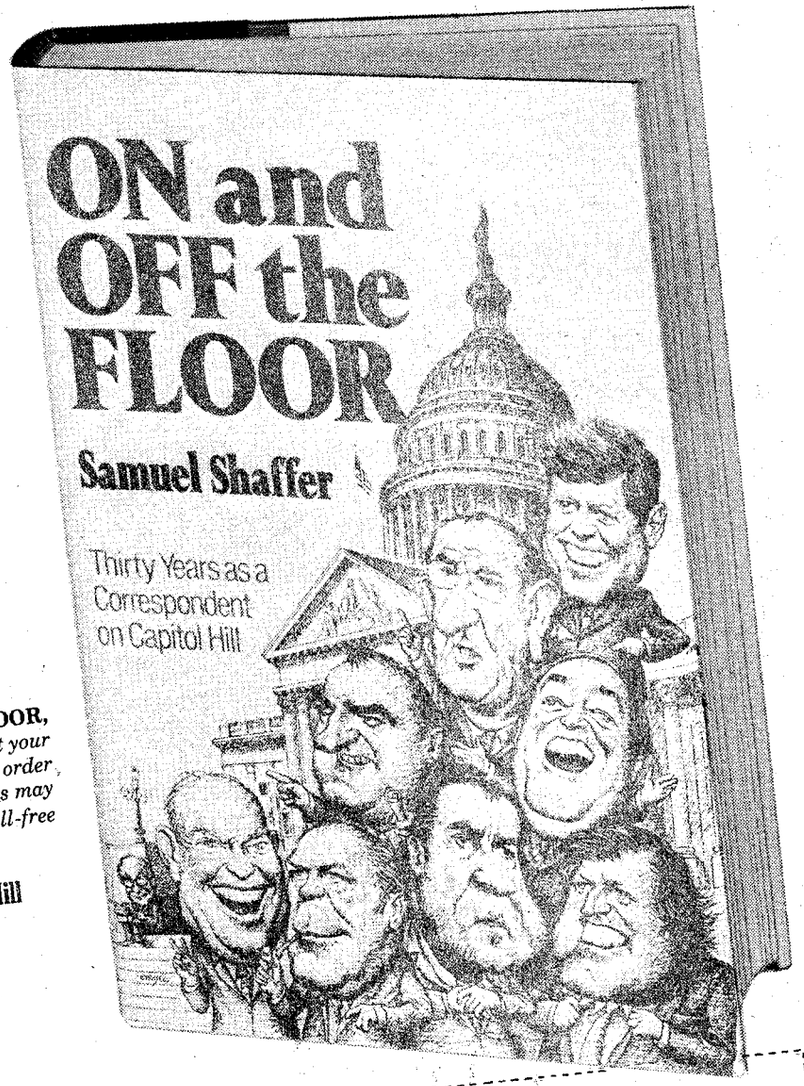

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